

BIBLICAL PREACHING AND THE KOREAN CHURCH

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## ABSTRACT

This work is a study focused on the biblical preaching and its significance in the Korean church. It is concerned with questions about biblical preaching in the Korean church's context.

A primary premise of the work is that there is lack of biblical preaching and confusion and misunderstanding about biblical preaching in the Korean church. The author suggests that this lack of biblical preaching is partly responsible for the distortion of sermons and theology in the Korean church.

The thesis begins with an overview which identifies problems of biblical preaching in the Korean church. The work includes chapters of explaining the significance of biblical sermon form and content in the pulpit, and provides suggestions for the Korean church. The thesis concludes with a chapter which contains suggested idea for how the Korean preaching might capture biblical sermon form and content.

A question in this thesis is developed around the idea that when Korean preaching will be biblically faithful and contextually relevant, the Korean church will be theologically and biblically healthy and sound.

## CHAPTER 1

### IDENTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEMS IN KOREAN PREACHING

Preaching should be a pleasant experience. But, it is a huge burden for most Korean preachers. Of course it is not a problem unique to them, but for Korean preachers the situation is worse than for any other preachers. Its reasons can be explained in many ways. In this introductory chapter common problems in Korean preaching will be identified and introduced. Those problems can be explained in many ways, but in this chapter it will be explained in three different categories: contextual, theological and homiletical.

In the second half of the last century the Korean church experienced explosive growth. Much of the credit for this growth should go to the preachers, even though they have been targeted by theological and social criticisms. Without the passionate, devoted preaching of Korean preachers, the Korean church would not have accomplished such a remarkable feat. But in reality many Korean preachers are struggling with their preaching, even though it is not a problem unique to Korean preachers alone. Preaching is a big challenge to the most Korean preachers.

This chapter's major task is to examine and analyze Korean preaching in general. We will examine distinctive characteristics of Korean preaching. However, in examining the characteristics of Korean preaching, theological analysis and evaluation will be avoided. Those aspects are beyond the focus of this study and to pursue them would be an extremely lengthy process. So in this chapter the biblio-homiletical aspect of Korean preaching will be examined and explored.

Historically and socially Korean Christians have had unique experiences and stories and so they need their own unique method for preaching. Here we will consider the characteristics of Korean preaching, although there is no agreement among homiletics about it. Without having an appropriate understanding of Korean Christian context and experiences, sermons would fail to penetrate the hearts of Koreans, and never bear fruits. So in the chapter we will explore the salient points of Korean preaching, even though it is not an easy task.

Some salient characteristics of Korean preaching in regards to its dealing with the Bible will be provided. But before we deal with Korean preaching and find out its characteristics, the Korean preacher's dilemma needs to be pointed out.

- (1) Most of them have not been educated in analytical skills: historical, literal understanding. They simply do not know how to analyze and exegete Scripture.
- (2) An ongoing issue for the most Korean preachers is that they don't have enough time to examine and explore the biblical text. They are simply too busy in their ministry.
- (3) Korean preachers mostly learn preaching by copying the styles of popular preachers, rather than doing their own work on the biblical text. This results in a lack of creativity in their sermons.

### **Contextual Problem**

Many Korean preachers do not have adequate skills to study the Bible and to make it into a sermon. One of the reasons why they lack skills in preaching comes from the lack of homiletical training in a theological seminary. My own experience tells a typical example

of that. When I was in theological seminary in the early eighties in Korea, preaching class was optional, not mandatory and many seminarians never took a preaching class before they graduated. So, most preachers did not have formal homiletical training before they entered into the ministry. Therefore they lacked adequate knowledge and skills for preaching. This lack of adequate knowledge of preaching has made many Korean preachers ignorant of the significance of preaching biblically and contextually. They just learned about preaching through personal reading and study, and by copying and preaching the sermons of other preachers.

A big problem is that they have to preach too many times. A typical Korean preacher has to prepare and deliver at least ten sermons a week.<sup>1</sup> And they also have to wrestle with their other pastoral duties, pastoral visitations and numerous other important obligations every day. Unfortunately if a pastor does not serve a big church and so cannot get help, the preacher has to take that burden all by himself or herself and his or her struggle will be an ongoing issue. Even these days, we don't see any noticeable change or improvement in their preaching situation, and so the same problem remains in the Korean pulpit.

Because of their lack of preaching skills and the numerous times of preaching they must deliver weekly, many Korean preachers are looking for a way to make preparation easier—though it is not desirable at all. They depend on sermons provided through books and other materials, and more recently through Internet programs, even though the context of the Korean preaching is different from their situations. In the last decades Korean

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<sup>1</sup> Most Korean pastors are required to deliver the sermons for Sunday morning worship, Sunday night worship, Wednesday night worship, Friday night worship, everyday prayer gatherings at dawn, and many extra, short messages. This is expected from the most pastors, even if they have no associate pastors or preachers for the church.

preaching was led by some popular preachers who had learned from the well-known preachers of the United States like Robert Schuler, Billy Graham, and more recently Charles Swindoll. Without addressing fundamental issues, this problem will be ongoing.

### **Theological Problem**

The Korean church is indisputably a church of the Bible. The Bible has a unique place for the Korean church and Christians. The Korean Church has put much emphasis on the Bible and on the place of the Bible in the church. The Bible has been recognized as having sole authority to guide and direct Christian life. Probably there are not many other Christian churches that put more emphasis on the significance of the Bible in their lives than the Korean church. If one visits any Korean church in Korea, he or she will notice their eagerness and great devotion to reading and studying the Bible. Many Korean Christians read the whole Bible several times a year.

Certainly no one can dispute the centrality and the uniqueness of the Bible in the Korean church and in its preaching. The role of the Bible in the Korean church can be summed up as:

1. Most Korean preaching uses the centrality of the Bible in the sermon.
2. They understand the Bible as the Word of God, inspired by the Spirit of God.
3. They put authority only on the Bible, not on human interpretations.

For most Korean Christians and preachers the Bible is the center of faith and confession. The centrality of the Bible in the church and Christian life was the outcome of the early protestant missionaries who came from the United States and other western

countries during the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. The missionaries had a conservative or evangelical theological interpretation of the Bible, and it became the theological ground for the Korean church and Korean Christians. Those missionaries taught their Korean students the inerrancy and verbal inspiration of the Bible, and the Korean church and Korean Christians were deeply influenced by the fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible.

It is hard to deny that unwavering Bible-centrism provides Korean Christians and preachers a strong Christian identity. Certainly this fact should be understood as a positive thing for Korean Christians, because it provides a helpful theology and doctrine for those who need certitude in times of crisis and uncertainty. In fact the Bible-centered faith and theology have given the Korean church a strong identity for their lives during the vicissitude of the twentieth century.

However, Bible-centrism has been misunderstood among some Korean Christians and their preachers. Liberal-minded Christians criticize the Bible-centrism and point out that the influence of the fundamentalist interpretations has dominated the theological trend of the Korean church. In fact this argument is not absurd. Many conservative Christians have a theologically narrow view of the Bible. They uncompromisingly stick to the truthfulness of one specific Bible version. For instance some American Christians regard the King James Version as the only God-approved Bible version. They do not acknowledge that the Bible they are using was translated from other human language.

In the late decades of the twentieth century, liberal theology has influenced the Korean church and its interpretation of the Bible, even though most Korean Christians and their

leaders remain followers of the more conservative or evangelical interpretation of the Bible. The transcendental factors of the Bible make preaching for the Korean congregation follow the general guidelines for biblical preaching.

### Allegorical Interpretation

One of the characteristics of Korean preaching is to interpret the Bible allegorically. Without adequate understanding of the significance of the historical and contextual study, many Korean preachers interpret the biblical passage as allegorical, or typologically. It is ironic that Korean Christians and preachers uncompromisingly hold on to the historicity of the Bible, but they interpret the historical facts allegorically. In its positive function, allegory tries to convey the spiritual meaning of the text. But allegorical interpretation often goes through verse-by-verse without a central theme. In allegorical sermons, there is hardly any coherent theme to help integrate the message into the lives of the congregation. There are apparently two different worlds in their lives, and the life in this world is meaningful only for the other world. For example, regarding the Exodus story, they believe that it is historically true, but they interpret it as an allegory. It symbolizes a life of believers. To enter into Canaan is to enter into heaven. Certainly in any situation, literal meaning of a certain word or phrase should not be neglected, but should be understood as a direct message, if it does not signify the meaning allegorically.

Allegorical interpretation is often called “spiritual interpretation” among Korean Christians. But an appropriate standard of the so-called “spiritual interpretation” has not been provided. That interpretative method has not been theologically tested and when it is

provided, its standard is subjective or arbitrary. Of course we cannot neglect the significance of the allegory in interpreting the Bible. John Holbert correctly explains the function of allegory as: “The use of allegory is based on a significant theological belief about the Scriptures. God has spoken in the Scripture. But God’s truths were obscure in the text and must be brought to the surface by allegorical interpretation.”<sup>2</sup>

Allegorical interpretation is a way to translate the literal meaning of the text into a symbolic meaning. In allegory, details of the text have one-to-one correspondence with events in our time, or with a typology brought to bear on the text. But allegorical interpretation apparently has some risks. It can make the text ahistorical and so can privatize the text and accordingly its original meanings can be misinterpreted or distorted.

John Holbert points out the danger of allegorical interpretation: “Nonetheless, there are obvious dangers in the allegorical interpretation of texts that are not true allegories. There is little check on the imagination of the interpreter. In the worst instances, anything goes. One is limited only by one’s fantasy and ingenuity.”<sup>3</sup>

Obviously there are some biblical phrases or stories that can be interpreted as an allegory, but when we interpret a certain biblical text allegorically we should be careful not to ignore the original intention of the author. For that purpose the interpreter should adopt historical, literal tools for the analysis of the Bible and these tools are urgently required for Korean preachers.

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<sup>2</sup> Ronald J. Allen and John C. Holbert, *Holy Root, Holy Branches: Christian Preaching from the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 23.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 24.

## Self-hermeneutic Methodology

Traditionally many Korean preachers have adopted the so-called “self-hermeneutic methodology.”<sup>4</sup> That is interpreting the Bible through the Bible. According to this methodology, the best tool for interpreting the Bible is the Bible. This method is based on the conviction that the Bible is the Word of God and the Bible itself can illuminate the Bible.

The principle of biblical commentary to interpret the Bible needs to be applied and should not be ignored. If the Bible is no longer a timeless sacred book or an absolute norm that represents unconditional truth or guidelines for Christian life, the authority of the Bible will be seriously weakened. The authority of the Bible should come from the fact that the Bible contains a penetrating theme through the entire Bible beyond the historical heritage of the community of faith. Even though many different human hands wrote the Bible, it has a salient theme that goes through it. Under the umbrella of that theme, intentions of the authors are connected and preachers can examine the text and discover the intention of the biblical author by means of objective historical, literary methods.

According to self-hermeneutic methodology, Korean preachers try to prove the text through the use of other passages in the Bible. To be truly biblical, the major assertions supporting the sermon’s basic concept must also be taken from the passage on which it is based. But this standard has an inclination to refuse considering and utilizing the historical, literary study of the Bible. We still do not disregard the fact that the Bible is a human work, even though it was breathed with the breath of God. So when we apply the self-hermeneutic

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<sup>4</sup> See Dong-sik Ryu, *The Vein of Korean Theology* (Seoul: Jun-Mang-Sa, 1982), 25.

methodology of interpreting the Bible, Korean preachers need to utilize other interpretative methodologies, because our understanding of the Bible will be enriched by it.

One more thing that we need to note is that Korean Christians do not have many versions of the Scripture. The most popular version of the Bible was translated in the mid 1930s, and it has a lot of grammatical errors as well as old and dead words. So many people cannot read and understand even with the Korean dictionaries.<sup>5</sup>

### **Homiletical Problem**

Among many Korean preachers there is confusion about the definition of preaching, what form a sermon should have. For many of them there has been only one kind of sermon, topical and three-point sermon. This sermon form has been dominant in Korean preaching for decades.

### **Confusion about Preaching**

Generally speaking, the basic understanding of the Bible among Korean preachers is soundly evangelical. But in spite of their evangelical understanding of the Bible there is still a real lack of biblical preaching in Korean preaching. It is ironic that in spite of the strong emphasis on the Bible for Christian churches and the pulpit, there has been this apparent lack of biblical preaching in the Korean church.

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<sup>5</sup> There are four different versions of the Bible. *Kae-Yuk Seong-Kyung* was translated in 1961, but from the English Bible, not from the original languages. *Common Translating Version* was published in 1977 by the joint effort of Protestant scholars and Catholic scholars, but no Protestant denomination is using it. In 1993, *Pyo-Jooin Sae-Bun-Yuk* published, but no denomination has adopted this version. *Sung-Kyung Jeon-Seo Sae-Bun-Yuk* was published in 2001, but it also is not officially used by any denomination.

For many Korean sermons, the biblical text has a supporting role rather than leading the sermon. During the last few decades the Korean church enjoyed fast growth, but that growth has also had some negative impact on sermons. Many Korean denominations have suffered church schism and division. In order to expand their membership each denomination has put much emphasis on church growth theology and doctrinal sermons. Accordingly, many sermons were devoted to defending a particular view of the Bible, and doctrinal sermons became popular among many preachers.<sup>6</sup> This phenomenon happened beyond the different interpretations: evangelicals, or fundamentalists, or liberals. That has resulted in distortions of the biblical message – wrong, misinterpretation or manipulating of passages for the benefit of their own denominations. And many sermons were devoted to defending a particular view of the Bible, whether orthodox or critical instead of interpreting the content of the Bible accurately. And so sermons frequently took a mere supporting role for that purpose. Especially this problem has been noticed in the biblical understanding of the fundamentalists. They have often distorted the message of the Bible by utilizing the biblical passage for the purpose of the uncompromising doctrine. Their confusion between the authority of the Bible and using of the Bible for their cause and profit has damaged and distorted the message of the Bible.<sup>7</sup> In that sense Leander Keck's criticism of the American Christians can be equally applied to Korean Christians. He pointedly states, "Whereas liberalized Christians appear to have decanonized the Bible, conservative Christians have

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<sup>6</sup> Jung-Young Lee criticizes this trend in *Korean Preaching: An Interpretation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 67.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

overcanonized it.”<sup>8</sup> Haddon Robinson’s criticism for evangelical preaching is equally applied to the Korean church. He writes, “A significant number of ministers—many of whom profess high regard for the Scriptures—prepare their sermons without consulting the Bible at all. While the sacred text serves as an appetizer to get a sermon underway or as a garnish to decorate the message, the main course consists of the preacher’s own thought or someone else’s thought warmed up for the occasion.”<sup>9</sup>

Under the influence of liberal theology, confusion about the place of the Bible and uncertainty about its authority in the church appears to have gained momentum among liberal preachers even though most preachers still hold on to the evangelical interpretations of the Bible. Preachers who were trained in the theologically liberal schools appear to struggle more because they perceive a noticeable gap between their theology and the local church’s experiences and expectations. They are also confused about the place of the Bible in the church, and so their biblical theology is unclear and indistinctively ambivalent. They do not know where they should stand between Bible-centrism and biblical criticism, so their sermon has an inclination not to be clear and certain.

Traditionally the three-point sermon form has been popular among Korean preachers. It is hard to deny that the topical, three-point sermon form is useful to deliver the sermon in a clear, simple way. That may be the most prominent reason why it has been loved by most Korean preachers. But it has a risk to change or to distort the message of the biblical passage according to the preacher’s theology or intention. When I graduated from the

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<sup>8</sup> Leander E. Keck, *The Bible in the Pulpit: The Renewal of Biblical Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978), 24.

<sup>9</sup> Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 25.

theological seminary, a pastor bought me a book which was written for helping busy Korean preachers. Its title was “333 Three-point sermons for the Pastors.” It contained some useful insights, but many of them were problematic, missed points and strictly and absurdly advocated making every passage into the three-point frame.

Reliance on the topical, three-point sermon form is an inevitable outcome of the current Korean preaching situation, because most Korean preachers have been forced to stand before the congregation without adequate understandings of biblical preaching and preaching skills. They have learned about preaching only by copying and imitating the sermons of others, namely the topical, three-point sermon.

In Korean preaching the preacher’s theological, ideological intention has made many of them to prefer topical sermons, because it is easier than any other form to prepare. In a topical sermon thorough analysis and explanation of the Bible is not required. Most sermons of the leading preachers of the Korean church have many biblical verses here and there, not specifically from the text.<sup>10</sup> So, the topical sermon form has prevailed in the Korean pulpit in the twentieth century.<sup>11</sup>

### Problem in Exegesis

A preacher’s first and foremost effort should be on analyzing and interpreting the Bible, because biblical preaching occurs through a faithful exposition of the Bible. In analyzing and interpreting the Bible, the first consideration should be how to make an accurate

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<sup>10</sup> Most sermons of Bishop Sun-Do Kim, one of the leading Korean preachers, show that Scripture merely plays a supporting role in his sermons. In his sermons, there are several biblical quotations, but those verses are not directly from the text.

<sup>11</sup> Sung-Ho Joo, *Homiletics for the Twenty-first Century* (Seoul: Dae-Han Ki-Dok-Kyo Seo-Hoe, 2001), 115.

exegesis. If the preacher fails to interpret the Bible accurately the sermon might lose its biblical basis and become unbiblical. Therefore, for the proper exegesis the preacher needs to employ proper skills to analyze the Bible. But in the Korean pulpit exegesis of the Bible has been weakened by the lack of skills in exegesis and analysis.

Another problem with Korean preaching is that it lacks a thorough exegesis on the biblical passage and does an inaccurate analysis of the biblical text. The truth of the Bible has been abused, damaged and distorted. Among many Korean preachers confusion between what is a sermon and what is not is obvious. Confusion and misconceptions have discouraged Korean preachers from a thorough analysis of the Bible. They, without having adequate understanding of preaching, are forced into the field of preaching and so often fail to deliver Bible-based sermons. The outcome is an ineffective sermon form which pervades and distorts the content of their sermons.

In fact, many evangelical preachers in Korea have shied away from literary, historical study, because they think the Bible is too holy and perfect for it to be analyzed by humans. In that sense Jung Yong Lee's criticism of current Korean preaching is not far-fetched. "The preacher is not interested in the historical and contextual importance of the passage, since the background of the passage he expounds is never explained, he is not in historical and biblical criticism at all. He attempts to prove the text through the use of other passages in the Bible."<sup>12</sup>

Traditionally Korean preachers prefer a topical sermon. It is easier to prepare and deliver a sermon without a lot preparation. So, rather than trying to thoroughly analyze the

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<sup>12</sup> Lee, *Korean Preaching*, 69.

biblical text, they try to find three points in the biblical text. The outcome is that the genre and original form of the text are frequently ignored, because they don't know how to handle the different forms of the text.

Recently more and more preachers are adopting the exegetical preaching method. But most Korean sermons are still uncritically exegetical and exegetically uniformed. In their exegetical sermons, a biblical text is often treated line-by-line, or verse-by-verse, to explain its meaning. The preacher goes through the text thoroughly from one verse to another trying to deliver the message of the biblical text directly and uncritically to the congregation. Of course the three-point sermon has a positive side in the sense that it helps the congregation understand the sermon message clearly. But it can also prohibit an historical, literary, or sociopolitical explanation of biblical witness to the Bible. It does not take the Bible seriously and does not put the Bible at the center of theology and faith.

Sung-Ho Joo, a homiletical professor in Korea, laments that “Actually I had studied in the colleges, bachelor’s program, graduate school program, and doctoral program, but I have never heard a clear lecture about biblical preaching. Perhaps, it is not too much to say that the Methodist Theological Seminary has sent out a lot of preachers in its 110 years of history, but perhaps no student has ever heard about the significance of expository sermon.”<sup>13</sup> I do not think he is exaggerating this reality. In my six years in theological seminaries in Korea, I took just one preaching class and it was a selective program. At that time most students did not take a single preaching class. A study indicates that in the book, *Sermons Celebrating 100 Years of the Korean Church*, out of 248 sermons, 59 sermons, or

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<sup>13</sup> Joo, *Homiletics for the Twenty-first Century*, 161.

23.8% were expository sermons, while 189 sermons, or 76.2%, were topical, or thematic sermons. And in the book, *Sermons of the Methodist Revivalists* 40 out of 47 sermons were topical sermons, and there were no expository sermons. And for theological seminary alumni, 43 out of 51 sermons were topical while eight were textual sermons.<sup>14</sup> Another study on sermon type indicates that 802 sermons out of 1093, or 73.5% were topical sermons, and 261 sermons, or 23.8%, textual sermons but there were only 30 expository sermons.<sup>15</sup>

In the Korean context, most seminarians are not open to relevant advice from theological seminaries on handling exegesis accurately, so preachers' frustration will continue unless there are fundamental changes. Regarding the exegetical issue, even though they do not need to adopt biblical criticism in preaching the Bible, they do need to learn how to examine and analyze the Bible accurately.

### Uniformity in Sermon Form

A unique characteristic in Korean preaching is that sermon patterns and contents are not diverse but relatively uniform. This phenomenon prevails among the theologically different interpretations or among the different denominations. If one visits churches of various denominations in Korea, he or she will notice that the pastors, with liberal or conservative, use similar sermon forms and contents. That phenomenon comes from the unique Korean preaching situation. Korean preaching has failed to adopt diverse sermon forms and has not

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<sup>14</sup> *Sermons of the Methodist Revivalists* (Seoul: Hee-Sun Publishing Company, 1993).

<sup>15</sup> Kyung-Jin Chun, *Study on the Renewal of Preaching* (Seoul: Seoul Theological Seminary, 1992), 34.

made any bold movement to study or create new sermon forms. Obviously lack of homiletic education and preaching skills plus the time it takes to prepare a sermon through thorough biblical analysis have caused uniformity in the sermon form and contents.

In Korean preaching the topical, three-point sermon is the dominant sermon form. Most Korean preachers prefer the topical sermon form. Moon-Koo Shin, in his doctoral thesis, analyzed the sermons of four Korean Methodist preachers and identified their preference for the three-point sermon. According to his study, more than sixty percent of the sermons he studied use the three-point sermon form.<sup>16</sup> In the eighties, a popular preaching book among Korean preachers was *Three Point Sermons for the 365 Days*. The book was written with the assumption that each biblical unit has three points, and arranged all the biblical passages into three-point-sermon format. The book was methodologically exegetical, but contained three-point sermon outlines exclusively. Like that book, many exegetical sermons are rewritten as a form of a three-point sermon.

The reason the three-point sermon form has prevailed in Korean preaching can be easily explained. It is easy to prepare the sermon and to deliver the message in a clear and concise way. Therefore, even though biblical passages may contain one big idea or several ideas in the biblical unit, preachers will still structure their sermons in three-point form. However, the risk in using the three-point sermon is that it may neglect the intention of the author and could manipulate or distort the message of the biblical passage according to the preacher's intention.

Another reason is that most Korean preachers were not trained to use diverse sermon

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<sup>16</sup> Moon-Koo Shin, *Study on the Sermons of the Korean Pastors* (Seoul: Methodist Theological Seminary, 1998), 134.

forms. They do not know how to do thorough exegesis on the biblical passage, so their sermons often are based on an irrelevant analysis of the biblical text, or contain no analysis at all. Therefore their sermons often contain no big idea, and include fragmentary or multiple ideas in their sermons. Korean preachers are learning by copying popular Korean or American preachers. Many preachers are familiar with three-point sermon, because they have read and heard that sermon form, so without serious consideration, preachers became disciples of the three-point sermon form.

Church schism is a factor in the emergence of the three-point sermon form in the Korean church. That's because it appears logical and the form makes it easy to express thought. So Korean clergy preach the three-point sermon form and Korean congregations expect sermons to be uncompromisingly doctrinal. Doctrinal sermons have a topical sermon form and topical sermons predominantly have three-points-sermon format.

Recently Korean Christians have seen positive signs that more and more preachers are taking expository preaching more seriously. Many young evangelical preachers who have been trained in the evangelical theological schools are employing expository sermon form. It is a good sign for the Korean church, that even though they still have a tendency to interpret and deliver the Bible verse by verse, and their sermons do not always include a major idea, or primary thought taken out of the biblical text, they are faithful to the Bible and hold the Bible in high regard.

### Issue of Creativity in a Sermon

Sermons reflect the preachers' theological inclination and preference, and in that sense

sermons have diverse biblical interpretations and theology. But in Korean preaching, diversity is lacking and uniformity is prevailing. Uniformity of preaching style has apparently prevented Korean preaching from being creative and relevant. A Korean theologian who taught in the United States points out: “One of the most distinctive aspects of Korean preaching is the lack of criticism in the exegetical and doctrinal sermons which are most popular in the Korean church today.”<sup>17</sup> His argument needs to be considered fairly, even though it cannot be accepted at face value.

Traditionally Korean Christians understand the Bible to be the Word of God on the basis of its infallibility. They regard the Bible as a collection of ahistorical and dogmatic statements about God. They strictly refuse any kind of historical, literary analysis of the Bible, because they think those methods are too human, and so should not be applied to the Bible. Human efforts to deliver the sermon have been understood as wrong. They insist that the Bible should be protected from any kind of critical interpretation. But this has prohibited the interpreter to creatively approach the Bible, because creativity has been understood as human, and there has been only copying of theology and sermon forms and contents of other preachers.

Many Korean sermons lack creativity in content and sermon form because they uncritically copy preaching styles of popular preachers. From the 1970s through the 1990s, well-known American preachers like Norman Vincent Peal and Robert Schuller influenced many Korean preachers. Under their influence Korean preaching focused on the positive and prosperity. Sermons were mostly topical; sometimes the text was barely mentioned in

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<sup>17</sup> Lee, *Korean Preaching*, 67.

the sermon. The biblical text took a supporting role in the sermon theme, or topic. Sermons frequently lacked thorough analysis and interpretation of the text. However it should not be assumed that a biblical text always be simple. The text should be approached from diverse perspectives and in that sense keep the creativity of the interpreters and preachers.

### **The Purpose of the Study**

This project is designed to provide a biblical and theological reflection on preaching, to apply it to the Korean church and to provide appropriate suggestions for the Korean pulpit. So, in this thesis, a homiletically sound understanding and practical suggestions for helping Korean preachers will be sought and provided.

For this purpose, in the first three chapters, basic conceptions of the Bible will be examined and explored.

In the second chapter biblical preaching will be explored by definition. To establish biblical theology as a primary hermeneutical tool for exegesis and an explanation of the Bible is critical. The significance of the biblical text and expository tool for preaching will be examined and explored.

In the third chapter criteria for biblical preaching will be sought and provided. A clear definition of biblical preaching is critical, because a biblical sermon will be a most effective and relevant sermon, textually and contextually.

The fourth chapter will explain why sermon form is important in biblical preaching, and see what kind of sermon form is suggested.

In the fifth chapter, based on the previous chapters, biblically relevant preaching

paradigms for the Korean Christian context and for their preachers will be suggested.

In the sixth chapter, I will describe how I am going to teach biblical preaching and its method to the Korean preachers.

### **Importance of the Study**

However, in spite of this pessimistic perception we, in recent days, have seen some positive change in the Korean pulpit, though it is gradual and limited. More and more preachers are taking preaching more seriously and are trying to learn by reading books on preaching, attending preaching seminars, etc. Unfortunately, however, most books or help have come from the American homiletics or preachers, who have different homiletical situations: fewer preaching obligations and more time to prepare. Their advice is generally acceptable to Korean preachers, but Korean preachers also need advice from those who really understand their situation.

This thesis is an attempt to state succinctly the possibility and necessity of preaching biblically in the Korean church. The renewal of biblical preaching can rejuvenate preaching in general, and thereby renews and redirects the Korean church.

This study is important for three reasons:

(1) Most Korean preachers have had little training in preaching and misunderstood what biblical preaching is. Korean pastors need to have a correct conception of biblical preaching and to learn how to preach effectively, because ministry in the pulpit enhances the ministry of the congregations. By emphasizing the significance of biblical preaching and by providing adequate definition of biblical preaching this study can evoke momentum for

Korean preachers and their congregations. Certainly theological schools in Korea need to teach about the sound and correct biblical preaching and to provide more opportunities for their students to study preaching and to develop skills for their future ministry in the pulpit in the practical sense.

(2) Korean preachers can get help from this study in the sense that it explores a biblically sound and a contextually effective preaching method for the Korean church and its preachers. In this study Korean preachers will be encouraged to adopt biblical preaching and to ground their sermons solely in the biblical text, and to let the biblical passage inform the sermon without being tarnished by the preacher's theology or ideology. For this purpose they will be encouraged to be more attentive to a thorough biblical analysis and an accurate interpretation of the Bible.

(3) In the Korean church, having an accurate understanding of the Bible should be taken more seriously and the significance of biblical preaching should be stressed more. My assumption is that when a sermon is thoroughly based on the Bible, the sermon naturally will be relevant to the congregation's needs and expectations, and thus will be effective. And this assumption will be verified in the next chapters. This study will be contributing to the Korean preachers' ability to develop biblically sound, contextually relevant sermons, having an adequate sermon content and form.

In Korean preaching, the significance of biblical preaching needs to be emphasized. Korean preachers need to be encouraged to be more attentive to the characteristics of biblical preaching by having appropriate skills to analyze and interpret the Bible. In that sense, this study will contribute to Korean preaching to find out what makes a sermon

biblical, why their preaching should be faithful to the intention of the biblical writers by having a correct understanding of biblical interpretation.

## CHAPTER 2

### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BIBLE FOR PREACHING

In the last few decades there has been a great change in the understanding of preaching, especially of its form and content. However, in spite of many changes, Christian preaching is always based on the Bible. If a sermon does not talk about the Bible, it is not Christian preaching no matter how rhetorically it is proclaimed. So, Fred Craddock is correct when he says, “Sermons not informed and inspired by Scripture are objects dislodged, orphans in the world, without mother or father.”<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter we will wrestle with answers to questions of what biblical preaching is and what authority the Bible has in preaching. For that reason, this chapter will focus on exploring and defining “biblical preaching.”

#### **Authority of the Bible**

In Christian preaching the Bible takes center stage. It cannot be Christian preaching if it fails to take the Bible seriously. So preaching necessarily should refer to the Bible and in that sense should be biblical. Preaching should be based on the Bible and correctly interpret the Bible. For that to happen the preacher needs to have a correct and adequate understanding of the Bible. Preaching depends on the preacher’s theology and understanding of the Bible. So if he or she does not have a correct understanding of the Bible, preaching might not be biblical, or is unbiblical. Fred Craddock, a leading

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<sup>1</sup> Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 27.

homiletician among the liberal scholars, clearly and correctly emphasizes the significance of the Bible in Christian sermons when he says: “Sermons not informed and inspired by Scripture are objects dislodged, orphans in the world, without mother or father.”<sup>2</sup>

What we think of the Bible is critical in biblical preaching because a sermon might be different according to how we understand the Bible. Understanding of the Bible and of biblical preaching is varied among theological interpretations. The understanding of “biblical” depends on the preacher’s theological interpretation and understanding.

There are apparent differences among scholars as to whether the Bible is the Word of God. Among the various interpretations of the Bible, there is a huge gap on the authority of the Bible.

Historically, the Bible has taken center stage in Christian preaching and its authority was not doubted until the nineteenth century when biblical scholars began questioning the authority and authenticity of biblical passages. Evangelical theologians and preachers follow the traditional understanding of the Bible and think that the Bible itself has its own authority, because it is the book that was inspired by God, and so it is the Word of God. But, under the influence of recent scientific biblical study the traditional understanding of the authority of the Bible has been adversely affected. It has been seriously challenged by biblical criticism: literary, form, historical. The traditional conception of biblical authority has been seriously challenged and weakened. And so traditional understanding of the Bible has been reexamined and redefined by liberal scholars. They have tried to redefine the concept of the Word of God and have claimed that the Bible has its authority only when the

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Bible is examined and verified by the interpreters through scientific study.

In spite of the challenges and changes in the understanding of the Bible, the issue of authority of the Bible still remains critical in preaching among evangelical preachers, because the preacher addresses the Bible as the Word of God and the congregation hears the Bible as the Word of God.

### **Bible as Human Work**

Traditionally Christians have believed that the Bible is the Word of God. The United Methodist Book of Worship instructs that during the worship service the Scripture reader needs to say, before or after reading, “The Word of the Lord (God),” or “Here the Word of God.”<sup>3</sup> However, when the congregation hears these phrases, their understanding and interpretations may vary according to their theology and faith.

Our first task in this chapter is to handle the human elements of the Bible. No one denies that human writers wrote the Bible and that the writers were from different times and cultures. God revealed himself through the Bible in human words. God did not dictate the words but spoke in and through human words. God used human writers and human languages to reveal Himself to the people.

If we acknowledge that human writers composed the Bible, the historicity of the Bible naturally is the point of issue. Views on the historicity of the Bible are diverse but can be categorized into two major opposing points of view. Evangelicals view the Word of God as historically correct. The Bible is true because it is historically true. But the liberal scholars

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<sup>3</sup> *The United Methodist Hymnal: Book of United Methodist Worship* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), 23.

view it differently. They think that many parts of the Bible are historically incorrect, but they argue that even though the Bible is historically not reliable, it can be true, because it was written symbolically rather than historically. In the Bible, truth has nothing to do with historicity. Of course even among the liberals there isn't unanimity in the understanding of the Bible and in their interpretations and applications of the Bible to sermons.

Many conservative theologians have suspicions that liberal scholars and preachers do not take the Bible seriously in their preaching. But liberal preachers argue that the Bible has always been important in their preaching. Bruce Vawter, by pointing out the Bible as "a faith book," maintains that:

When the Scripture are understood as human documents, they then are susceptible to all the canons of modern historical analysis. . . . From the perspective of faith, however, they may have quite a different significance. But one should never conclude that the Scriptures are unimportant to the liberal Christian. Quite the contrary, they are central to the Christian faith. The fact that more attention is given to them as symbolic documents than as historical documents does not distort their importance.<sup>4</sup>

Donald McKim supports this by insisting, "What makes the Bible important is neither literalness nor historicity, but rather the images, as represented in story and parable and example that challenge the moral imagination."<sup>5</sup>

Liberal scholars insist that in spite of the divine direction in the Bible, it has human elements and therefore is limited. The Bible is historically conditioned and particularized by the context of the writers. The Bible was written by human writers and so was conditioned by the time and culture in which it was written and edited. The Bible has its

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<sup>4</sup> Bruce Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 89.

<sup>5</sup> Donald K. McKim, *The Bible in Theology and Preaching: How Preachers Use Scripture* (Nahsville: Abingdon, 1994), 47, originally quoted from *Spectrum of Protestant Beliefs*, ed. Robert Campbell (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing, 1968), 34.

clear limitations, even though God is revealed in it. They even argue “strictly speaking, the Bible itself is not the pure Word of God.”<sup>6</sup> Some scholars even go further in their arguments about the Bible. They have considered the Bible as nothing more than the ancient religious writings of an ancient people not significantly different from other ancient writings. Marcus Borg, a vanguard of the liberal interpretations, states that: “We need to be clear and candid. The Bible is a human product. If it is ascribed to divine inspiration, there will be ‘massive confusion.’”<sup>7</sup> The Bible has thus only a human origin, so it should be handled in a way we handle other human works. For them the Bible was conditioned by the culture. This understanding is expressed in Sallie McFague’s claim that the Bible is a “metaphor,” but cannot claim its finality as the Word of God. She writes,

If we know God by the indirection of the Bible, then the Bible ‘is and is not’ the word of God. The Bible is a metaphor of the world or ways of God, but as metaphor it is a relative, open-ended, secular, tensive judgment. It is . . . the premier metaphor, the classic model, of God’s ways for Christians, but as a metaphor it cannot be absolute, ‘divinely inspired,’ or final.<sup>8</sup>

The central argument of the liberal scholars is that even though God is perfect, God’s message is limited by human limitedness and cultural factors. They also insist that in spite of its human factors, the biblical message can be God’s word insofar as the biblical writers were “inspired” and the message of the Bible has God’s word. Insofar as the biblical writers were inspired, then the Bible can be a spiritual book.

Liberal scholars also argue that the Bible is a book of faith, not of historical facts, and that the original writers of the Bible were not interested in the historical facts, but they

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<sup>6</sup> C. H. Dodd, *The Authority of the Bible*, rev. ed. (London: Collins, 1967), 27.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Mark Tooley, “The Celebration of Unbelief,” *Good News*, July/August 1999, 26.

<sup>8</sup> Sallie MacFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 54.

collected the oral traditions and theologized them or wrote according to their faith and theology. They, therefore, insist that the historical facts were not important for the ancient Christians and for the writers of the Bible.

But here is a possible question for evangelical Christians to ask of those with a liberal understanding of the Bible. If the Bible is historically incorrect—even though they mention this euphemistically—but the people of ancient time believed it as true, can it be true for today's congregation? Even though a story of the Bible is not historically true, can it be claimed as religiously true because people in biblical times believed it? But for the liberal scholars, it can be claimed as true, even though the truth cannot be supported by historical facts. But there is a problem with this school of thought. For regarding the resurrection of Jesus, liberal scholars do not think that it is a historical fact, but they think it is truth, because ancient Christians believed Jesus' resurrection as a truth. Then here is our question: If an illustration is made up by a preacher, and it is believed by the preacher and his or her congregation, then can it claim its legitimacy as a truth? If the biblical stories are not based on the historicity—of course we do not deny that they may be incorrect in numbers or in others ways—it should be a truth, because it is claimed as a fact. For the evangelical interpretation, the resurrection of Jesus should be historically based and true. The historicity of the resurrection, the fact that some thing really happened should not be denied.

Obviously it is not possible to separate the historical fact from the truth. Of course the historical fact that we have obtained can be different from the fact that really happened. And there may be mishandling and possible distortion in the process of collecting and editing. Apparently human writers who were restricted and influenced by their social,

political, economical, and religious experiences and ideas wrote the Bible. But at least we should not deny that it was written based on historical facts. Without having historical sources, a truth cannot be a truth. And if the claim of faith is in the hands of the interpreters, then there is no absolute truth, and if a truth is a mere truth, it is not a truth at all.

Certainly the liberal understanding of the Bible comes from a strong confidence in human ability to perceive the Bible. They argue that when the Bible is completely open to criticism, its original message can be detected and so the Bible should be open to criticism. The primary task of the biblical interpreter is to be faithful to the method of criticism and to see through the cultural aspects and to get rid of them. A leading feminist theologian critically says that, “I would . . . suggest that the revelatory canon for theological evaluation of biblical andocentric traditions and their subsequent interpretations cannot be derived from the Bible itself but can only be formulated in and through women’s struggle for liberation from all patriarchal oppression.”<sup>9</sup> In line with this Phyllis Trible says that, “the authority of the Bible comes, then, from individual readers and communities of faith.” If we accept this contention, that the authority of the Bible depends on individual interpretations, then no one can say they have more authority than the Bible itself in their preaching.

But from the evangelical perspective, if the Bible is a document of faith, lacking historical facts, the authority of the Bible might be seriously weakened and will lose its influence for the preacher and the congregation. If a document of faith can be volatile and without basis of fact, it will lose its ground of claim to be true.

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<sup>9</sup> Elisabeth Schuessler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 32.

## Biblical Criticism

There is no denying that historical, literary and linguistic study of the Bible has positive aspects despite some conservatives' skepticism and contention. Certainly historical, literary study has provided a mode of understanding that leads the Bible into the life of the church. And despite the suspicion from the fundamentalists, biblical study, especially biblical criticism, has developed a way to understand and interpret the Bible. Its positive contribution to the study of the Bible and for preaching should not be ignored, even though the evangelicals and fundamentalists have criticized the method of biblical criticism.

Biblical criticism is a major tool used to explore and interpret the Bible for liberal scholars. They believe that the biblical message was distorted and tainted by human factors, and so the core message of the Bible is hidden, and not obvious. So they try to separate the core message of the Bible from the Bible itself, because they think that the Bible is limited by language and culture. The Bible should be criticized and the core of the gospel should be taken out from the Bible.

But biblical criticism also has had a negative influence in the sense that it has weakened the authority of the Bible fundamentally and shifted the basis of the authority from the Bible to the interpreter's interpretation. In any case biblical criticism should not dissolve the authority and authenticity of the Bible. David Larsen, an evangelical scholar, cynically speaks about the current trend of handling the Bible as "The scissors-and-paste approach also removes the Bible from laypeople . . . only the Ph.D. seems capable of sorting truth from error."<sup>10</sup> If we acknowledge the authority of the Bible only within the limit of our

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<sup>10</sup> David L. Larsen, *The Anatomy of Preaching: Identifying the Issues in Preaching*

rationale and understanding of the interpreters or preachers, the ground for the authority is on the interpreter himself or herself, not the Bible itself. And if we only acknowledge the human factors and cultural limits of the Bible, no one can deliver the Word of God with full authority.<sup>11</sup>

In that sense David Larsen correctly argues that the interpreter's tools to interpret the Bible should not supersede the authority of the Bible in any circumstance.

Biblical criticism, or the historical-critical method, as important as some aspects of this pursuit are led the scholarly world up a blind alley to the point where commentaries on the text could no longer address the spiritual issues of God and his saving grace in the lives of his people. The biblical story was refracted through the assumptions of evolutionary theory and anti-supernaturalism. The result was a fragmentation and a de-spiritualizing that destroyed the message of the one word of God.<sup>12</sup>

Then, in spite of the evangelical preachers' reluctance to accept the liberal scholars' argument, Fred Craddock's view should be seriously considered by all the interpreters and preachers of the Bible, because the Bible, even though it was written by the inspiration of the Spirit of God, was written by humans, who were limited by time and location and culturally contextualized. Craddock persuasively argues that:

To understand more thoroughly that body of literature, a host of helping disciplines had arisen: historical, literary, form, and textual criticism. And very helpful they were. The preacher should not look upon these disciplines as otherwise, for the Bible as a collection of ancient documents surely deserves the compliment of objective examination as much as other literature. A refusal to make use of these tools to ascertain the proper text reading, its relation to other literature, and the cultural-historical milieu out of which it arose, is a move toward dishonestly prompted either by a fear of what might be discovered or by an impatience to get a sermon that cannot tarry at books that

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*Today* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 24.

<sup>11</sup> Jana Childers, *Performing the Word: Preaching as Theater* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 25.

<sup>12</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 200), 23.

are not heavy faith homiletical fruit.<sup>13</sup>

Regarding the question of cultural influence in the Bible we need to ask the question. How do we interpret it? The Bible was certainly written by authors who were limited by culture and time. But even though the Bible was affected by human factors, the Spirit of God authored it. So the fact that the Bible is at the same time both human and divine should be recognized.

Conclusively the evangelical understanding of the Bible can be summarized with the claim of Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart as: “The Bible is the Word of God given in the words of [people] in history. It is this dual nature of the Bible that demands of us the task of interpretation.”<sup>14</sup> In spite of the human factors, the Bible cannot be inaccurate and can claim its authority in the sense that it is in the Bible and inspired by the Spirit of God. Therefore the authority of the biblical words should not be challenged by human interpretation or criticism.

### **The Bible as Word of God**

Traditionally the Bible has been believed to be the Word of God. But contemporary biblical scholarly efforts have undermined this belief. For many of them the Bible is a mere human work that tells some experiences of God. But that kind of thinking is dangerous to the orthodox interpretation of the Bible, because preaching could become merely the sharing of thoughts about religious topics instead of critical proclamations for Christians.

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<sup>13</sup> Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, revised and with new sermons (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2002), 91.

<sup>14</sup> Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 15.

In the early Christian tradition the writing of the Bible was described as inspired and authoritative. But, in the modern era the scholarly debate began to separate the aspects of authority, inspiration and canonicity. The debate between Christians over the nature of inspiration and biblical interpretation has been complicated and diversified.

David Buttrick, a well-known liberal homiletician, challenges the traditional, evangelical understanding of the authority of the Bible by saying that: “Is the whole Bible a book that must be preached simply because it is the Bible and somebody has labeled it as the Word of God?”<sup>15</sup> This question takes issue with how much authority we put on the Bible in our preaching. Phyllis Trible argues,

The Bible as a whole makes no claim to being either ‘the word of God’ or inspired by God. In its entirety it does not avow divine authorship, either directly or derivatively. Furthermore, for the most part individual books within the whole follow suit. They do not profess to be ‘the word of God,’ even though sections within them may carry the designation.<sup>16</sup>

And, in his evaluation of the handling of the Bible, David Buttrick, in the same manner, criticizes neo-orthodox biblical theology (Here theology which follows Karl Barth’s theology) of having regained the centrality of the Bible for preaching. He differentiates preaching from the authority of the scripture from “preaching good news without any appeal to authority at all.”<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, the fact that liberal preachers take the Bible seriously in their sermons does not mean that they stand in the same line with the traditional understanding of the Bible.

According to their general liberal conception of the Bible, the Bible is a word of God,

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<sup>15</sup> David Buttrick, *A Captive Voice: The Liberation of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 11.

<sup>16</sup> Phyllis Trible, “Authority of the Bible,” in *The New Interpreter’s Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 2249.

<sup>17</sup> Buttrick, *A Captive Voice*, 11.

because it was written through the eyes of faith, not because it is based on the fact.

For the evangelical interpreters and preachers the Bible is the Word of God. The logic for the evangelicals is that the Bible is God's Word, because it is fully inspired by God. Keith Willhite fairly summarizes evangelical understandings of the Bible. "The essential, hermeneutical commitments are as follows: (1) We embrace a high view of Scripture for preaching. (2) The only way to say 'thus saith the Lord' is to say what the Bible says."<sup>18</sup> The presupposition for the evangelical interpretations is that the Bible is fully the Word of God. They think the Bible is purely divine because God inspired it in spite of human, cultural factors in the Bible. For them God's inspiration is enough to block the taints and distortion of cultural factors, even though it was written by human authors.

Perhaps most of the criticism for the evangelical interpretation of the Bible can be summarized with the Leander Keck's argument. He insists, "They (evangelicals) assume that the Bible is valid only if it is both error-free in all respects and theologically self-consistent at all points...The logical tensions and historical inaccuracies are a threat only if one assumes that the religious and moral power of the Bible depends on demonstrating that these differences do not really exist."<sup>19</sup>

In a sense Leander Keck's criticism is not far-fetched. Fundamentalists' understanding—not of the evangelicals—of the Bible is strictly literalistic and historical is the key in their understanding of the Bible. They refuse the argument to diminish or challenge the authority of the Bible, because they believe that the authority of the Bible

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<sup>18</sup> Keith Willhite and Scott M. Gibson, eds., *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching: Connecting the Bible to People* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 14.

<sup>19</sup> Keck, *The Bible in the Pulpit*, 108.

hinges on the historicity of the Bible. For the fundamentalist every single element of the Bible must be infallible in its verbal expression. This view of the Bible stressed the inerrancy of the Bible, which means that the Bible is completely accurate on all matters of science, history, and geography about which it teaches. They seem to ignore that the Bible was written in a particular time and culture, and biblical scholars, mere humans, translated the Bible.

Certainly the evangelical understanding of the Bible is simplistic in the sense that it takes the authority of the Bible from the assumption that the Bible can claim its totality and finality because it was inspired by God and denies any human factors in the Bible, even though it was written in human languages. But this view does not refuse to accept a thorough analysis and interpretations of the Bible. So, unlike the criticism of the liberal theologians for the evangelicals, they consider the historical, literary analysis of the Bible seriously, even though most evangelicals are reluctant to employ the words, “biblical criticism.” They consider that historical and literary study can help the preacher understand the Bible more.

David Buttrick questions the authority of the Bible and insists that when a preacher views the Bible through the eye of cultural and historical perspectives, the Bible possesses its own uniqueness as a witness to God’s revelation. But, for him the uniqueness of the Bible doesn’t necessarily mean that the Bible can claim its full authority. He thinks that the Bible should not be read in its totality and finality, because the Bible, he believes, is a record of people of faith at rather primitive levels, but certainly not a dependable document for guiding the faith and ethics of modern people.

But unlike Buttrick's argument, for the evangelical scholars there is no question as to the authority of the Bible. Evangelical scholars accept the Bible purely as God's words, and as the final, complete form of God's revelation for us. There is no question about whether the Bible is really the word of God. Even though many of them listen to biblical criticism and employ the methodology of biblical criticism, their dependence upon biblical criticism is limited, because they believe it denies the finality of the Bible and weakens the authority of the Bible. Their conception of the Bible is clear and plain. Keith Willhite writes: "If we embrace a high view of Scripture for preaching, then surely we want to represent the Bible accurately. Closely related is the evangelical commitment that the only way to say 'thus saith the Lord' is to say what the Bible says."<sup>20</sup> Even though human authors wrote the Bible, it is not a mere human document, because the Spirit of God inspired it.

Evangelicals do not ignore that the writers of the Bible were human and so the Bible had particularity culturally and linguistically. In the understanding of the human elements of the Bible, Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart rightly help us by writing:

Because the Bible is God's Word, it has eternal relevance; it speaks to all humankind, in every age and in every culture. Because it is God's Word, we must listen- and obey. But because God chose to speak his Word through *human words in history*, every book in the Bible also has historical particularity; each document is conditioned by the language, time, and culture in which it was originally written. . . . Interpretation of the Bible is demanded by the 'tension' that exists between its *eternal relevance* and its *historical particularity*.<sup>21</sup>

In their book, Gordon Fee and Stuart Douglas correctly point out the weaknesses of both liberalism and fundamentalism. One of the problems of liberal theology, according to them, is that "Interpretation that aims at, or thrives on, uniqueness can usually be attributed to

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<sup>20</sup> Willhite and Gibson, *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching*, 16.

<sup>21</sup> Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 17.

pride . . . , a false understanding of spirituality . . . , or vested interests (the need to support a theological bias, especially in dealing with texts that seem to go against that bias)”<sup>22</sup>

They are also critical of the fundamentalist interpretation on the Bible. They write, “On the other hand, there are those who think of the Bible only in terms of its eternal relevance. Because it is God’s Word, they tend to think of it only as a collection of propositions to be believed and imperatives to be obeyed.”<sup>23</sup>

Certainly the Bible is human and divine. The Bible was written in a particular time and culture. This means that the Bible can be open to the historical, literary exegesis and explanation. In that sense the argument of Gordon Fee and Stuart Douglas rings true: “Rather he (God) chose to speak his eternal history. This also is what gives us hope. Precisely because God chose to speak in the context of real human history, we may take courage that these same words will speak again and again in our own ‘real’ history, as they have throughout the history of the church.”<sup>24</sup>

For the evangelicals the source and authority of the Bible is divine inspiration. For them it is obvious that human logic and rationality cannot deprive the Bible of its authority. But the concept of “inspiration” should be differentiated from the fundamentalist’s view that every single letter of the Bible was inspired or even dictated by God. For the fundamentalists the Bible should be understood as very literal because it was written by the inspiration of God. The Bible is seen as being without error not only in matters of faith but also in matters of historical facts. They interpret the Bible strictly literally, based on the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

belief that the Bible was inspired, and therefore the Bible should not be erroneous. This position seeks to affirm an inerrant Bible as absolutely necessary for the sake of certainty in crafting theology and ethics.

Here are some questions for the liberal understanding of the Bible. If the Bible is no longer a timeless sacred book or an absolute norm that represents unconditional truth or guidelines for Christian life but is rather the historical tradition of the faith community, how can the Bible overcome the limits put on it by the interpreter's interpretation? If we put more authority on the scholarly works than on the Bible itself, the authority of the Bible remains vulnerable to attacks on the genuineness of the biblical message. If we deny any kind of trans-historical characteristics of the Bible, it is merely a human work that shows mere human experiences of God.

The Bible is the Word of God, because it is the record of the God's self-revelation. If we acknowledge the Bible only as a human book, then its authority will be diminished. And anyone can claim any particular ancient religious book as the same divine revelation. There is no rationale to refute them as a mere human work. If the Bible is a purely human work, the Bible cannot claim its full authority for preachers and congregations and will lose its authority when the preacher proclaims it.

### **Significance of the Bible for Preaching**

Theology obviously shapes biblical hermeneutics and homiletical decisions. The preacher constructs a sermon based on his or her theology and biblical conception. As Karl Barth says, "Theology and preaching exist in a dialectical relationship, one shaping the

other, one helping to bring the other to expression.”<sup>25</sup> Theology exists for preaching. Barth also says that preaching is the culmination of the theology of the preacher.

The Bible is the source of Christian preaching. It claims it as its sole authority. In Christian preaching the Bible is central. Therefore without reading and delivering the Bible faithfully a preacher’s sermon cannot be considered Christian. Preaching is the primary purpose of interpretation and a primary motive for biblical studies. Biblical studies exist for preaching, not vice versa, even though preaching helps the biblical studies. Therefore, biblical studies that do not contribute to preaching are meaningless and aimless works.

The significance of the Bible for preaching comes from the Bible itself. The Bible has its authority, because it is the Word, inspired by the Spirit of God. The Bible is infallible in regard to matters of facts and faith. Even though errors or inconsistencies might be discerned in the biblical text to our modern, scientific eye, it does not mean that the Bible is incorrect regarding facts. The Bible should be incorrect because it was inspired by God. In his letter to Timothy, Paul mentions the significance of the Bible for Christian life as “The holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (1 Tim 3:15b-17). The Bible is true and factual and so contains essential and eternal truth.

The significance of the Bible for preaching should not be neglected or negated for any reason, because one’s view of the Bible will make one’s sermon different. David Larson correctly maintains that:

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<sup>25</sup> Karl Barth, *Homiletics*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Donald, E. Daniels (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 37.

It is clear that what we believe about the Bible will determine how we shall approach the preaching of the Bible. If we do not believe that the Bible is divinely given revelation from God, miraculous and supernatural, we shall see it as a smorgasbord from which to pick and choose. But if we believe the Bible is truly the Word of God, then we must seek to preach ‘the whole counsel of God’ as reliably set forth on its pages.<sup>26</sup>

The preacher will preach what he or she believes about the Bible. Charles Bartow writes the significance of the Bible in his book as

The Bible, like the preaching it enables (as God wills), is God’s human speech. In it we encounter divine reality on the turf of human and natural history, and so we encounter ourselves as we are, as we would be, and as God would have us be. So the Bible does not simply contain God’s Word. It is God’s Word, God’s human speech with us, about us, against us, and thereby for us. It is in just this sense that we can say that God authors Scripture and authorizes preaching.<sup>27</sup>

I feel that attempts to erode commitment to biblical authority should be stopped.

Contrary to what liberal scholars declare, critical study of the Bible has eroded the authority of the Bible and weakened the power of its message. Even though its positive contribution to biblical study can be acknowledged, it has degraded preaching to a mere human address, or speech about a book.<sup>28</sup>

Of course the Bible can be misinterpreted, manipulated and misrepresented by interpreters. Certainly God has given us freedom to interpret the meaning of the Bible in our context. But as Phyllis Trible says, “the authority of the Bible embraces a cluster of concepts rather than a simple formulation. The concepts, themselves open to interpretation, spread among authors, texts, and readers in diverse settings. From ancient to contemporary times, then, the subject remains unsettled.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Larsen, *Anatomy of Preaching*, 30.

<sup>27</sup> Charles L. Bartow, *God’s Human Speech: A Practical Theology of Proclamation* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1997), 43.

<sup>28</sup> Larsen, *Anatomy of Preaching*, 25.

<sup>29</sup> Trible, “Authority of the Bible,” 2253.

Regarding the question of who has the authority, the Bible or the interpreter, the Bible solely, not the interpreter, should have authority. Biblical preaching should focus attention on the issue of biblical authority, not because the people expect it, but because the Bible itself tells the Word of God with full authority over the people. When the authority of the Bible goes under the authority of the interpreter, the Bible merely plays the supporting role for the preacher's intention, and can be a mere footnote for the preacher's agenda.

The scholars alone should not monopolize the Bible. The Bible is a book for the people who want to follow the steps of Jesus Christ. The Bible is the church's book. The Bible is for the congregation, not for scholars, even though scholars have certain advantages because of their ability to analyze and interpret it. The preacher should interpret the Bible. The preacher, as a reader and expositor of the Bible, encounters the world of the Bible and experiences the grace of God through the help of the Holy Spirit. In preaching, the preacher helps the congregation to encounter the original setting of the Bible and to help them apply the message of the Bible to their own problems and present possible solutions.

When a sermon does not reflect confidence in the authority of the Bible, it loses its power and becomes mere human rhetoric or speech espousing a particular (political) agenda. Surely the Bible is human and divine at the same time. But, the human aspect of the Bible does not erode the divine side of the Bible. As David Larsen points out, "If there is no significant difference between the Bible and Aesop's Fables or Joseph Smith's tablets we are abandoned with a hopeless mixture of truth and error calculated to foster hesitation and equivocation in the pulpit."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Larsen, *Anatomy of Preaching*, 25.

The fundamental concept of preaching the Bible is that it is eternally valid, even though the Bible is a historically conditioned vehicle by which that content is conveyed. Preaching the Bible is the way of God’s proclamation. God uses the preacher as a tool to proclaim the message of the Bible. Biblical scholarship only serves people, not biblical scholars, because the Bible was written for people, not for biblical scholars. Therefore the significance of preaching should not be neglected and the authority of the Bible should not be negated.

No one can monopolize the authority and authenticity of their sermons as “biblical.” As Fred Craddock correctly states that only the Bible itself “determines when preaching is biblical, just as it is Mozart who determines when music is Mozarcean.”<sup>31</sup> Only the Bible itself will determine what is, or what constitutes biblically accurate and theologically sound preaching. However, in spite of the subjectivity of the measurement and judgment of the preaching, we can have some conclusive definition of biblical preaching. But we are going to delay discussion about biblical preaching to the next chapter.

The goal of biblical interpretation in preaching is to lead the entire congregation to encounter the presence and work of God the Spirit in their daily lives as well as in the Bible and to encourage them to live as living parables of the kingdom of God. Our basic assumption is that the Bible is fully inspired and constitutes a truly truthful, divine-human book. “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Heb 4:12).

Preaching deals with both the construction and communication of the Bible. Preaching

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<sup>31</sup> Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 27.

should primarily focus on the message of the Bible. If we regard the Bible as the Word of God through which He addresses people in history, then it follows that preaching must be based on the Bible.

In the next chapter we will explore what makes a sermon “biblical.” For that purpose particular criteria of the biblical sermon will be presented and discussed.

## CHAPTER 3

### CRITERIA FOR BIBLICAL PREACHING

In the previous chapter we have examined and explored the significance of the Bible for preaching. As was explained, the Bible is the source of the preaching and it is the sole authority in preaching. In Christian preaching the Bible should take center stage. Without reading and interpreting the Bible faithfully preaching cannot be the Christian preaching at all. In that sense preaching should be biblical. Preaching should be biblically accurate and authentic. Then, what makes preaching “biblical?” It is not an easy task to define what biblical preaching is, because when one claims his or her own sermon as “biblical,” the claim depends on his or her biblically understanding and theology. So it may be “far easier to preach the Bible unbiblical [sic] than to do so biblically.”<sup>1</sup>

There is no consensus about what biblical preaching is among scholars. Different scholars have different definitions of biblical preaching. Interpretations of the Bible and understandings of biblical preaching are varied among them. But in spite of differences among the preachers’ understanding of biblical preaching, there should be an overarching agreement that sermons be centered on the Bible. In spite of the difficulty in reaching an agreement on biblical preaching, some criteria for it may be drawn. So in this chapter we are going to examine what makes a sermon biblical and accordingly provide those criteria which are critical to biblical preaching.

Three questions need to be primarily examined: (1) Does a word that it is in the Bible

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<sup>1</sup> Leander E. Keck, *The Bible in the Pulpit: The Renewal of Biblical Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978), 11.

mean that it is “biblical?” (2) Without giving thorough authority to the Bible, can a sermon be claimed as “biblical”? And (3) what criteria are applied to “biblical” preaching? In this chapter we will specifically deal with the criteria of biblical preaching and also will try to find out appropriate answers to the question of what makes preaching biblical. For this purpose, the primary focus of this chapter will be on the definition of “biblical preaching,” and attempting to identify what is not biblical preaching. Sometimes we will only compare two opposite interpretations of the Bible, even though there are many preachers who straddle the middle.

### **Bible-centeredness of the Preaching**

Preaching centers on the Bible. The preacher delivers the message of the Bible and nothing else. But it does not mean that the preacher speaks only about the Bible and nothing else. In that sense, one of the fundamental criteria for biblical preaching should be how seriously the preacher considers the Bible in his or her preaching. If the preacher does not take the Bible highly into consideration when preparing his or her sermon, it cannot be a biblical sermon. The authority and authenticity of preaching are closely connected with the authority of the Bible, because the preacher expounds and delivers the message of the biblical text. The reliability and effectiveness of a sermon depend on where the authority of the Bible lies, because when a sermon is biblical it can be most reliable and effective.

The basic assertion of biblical preaching is that “A sermon is the word of God only to the extent that it faithfully proclaims the word of God in the Bible.”<sup>2</sup> Biblical preaching is

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<sup>2</sup> Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and*

nothing but listening to and speaking for the Bible. Therefore ‘God has spoken!’ is the sure premise of all biblical preaching; human language has been employed for divine service.<sup>3</sup>

When we deal with the question of what makes a sermon “biblical,” our primary question is, does a sermon that talks about the Bible always mean that it is “biblical?” Or “Without giving a thorough exposition to the Bible—even though it is not verse by verse exposition—can a sermon become “biblical”? Or “without believing the full authority of the Bible, can the preacher preach the Bible with full confidence and authority?”

These questions cannot be answered in only a few paragraphs. Preaching should be centered in the Bible. However, Bible-centeredness does not mean that a sermon stays only in the Bible. Biblical preaching should be more than copying or repeating, or quoting the biblical verses. A sermon is not Bible-centered simply because it talks about the Bible. Quoting numerous verses from the Bible does not make a sermon “biblical.” David Larsen correctly notes, “The sermon which starts in the Bible and stays in the Bible is not biblical.”<sup>4</sup>

When a sermon is Bible-centered or Bible-based it can be “biblical.” Bible-centered preaching expounds the Bible accurately and faithfully and it delivers the biblical message to the congregation. Even though biblical passages are diverse in their forms and sizes, and sermon forms and deliveries are diverse, biblical preaching should be centered in the biblical text, because when preaching is not biblical, its authenticity is lost. Therefore it is not absurd to say that the word “biblical” is not different from “Bible-centered.”

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<sup>3</sup> *Preaching Biblical Literature* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 122.

<sup>4</sup> David L. Larsen, *The Anatomy of Preaching: Identifying the Issues in Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 25.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

When we say that preaching should be “Bible-centered,” it means that only the Bible can claim the authority in the preaching. Neither the interpreter nor the congregation should usurp the authority from the Bible. As Haddon Robinson, who has been a leading homiletiician among the evangelical preachers, insists that the authority of biblical preaching is ultimately “not in the preacher but in the biblical text. Only when the preaching centers in the biblical text, and so when the Bible has its authority, it can be God’s method to communicate with the people.”<sup>5</sup>

The Bible should be understood as its full complete form and should not be thought as an outcome of mere human works, even though the human writers who were restricted in the particular time and culture wrote it. If we put more authority on the interpreters’ knowledge and rationality than the Bible itself, especially when the message of the Bible conflicts with today’s intelligence, we cannot avoid the traps of subjectivism or absolute relativism. Then the Bible would be a mere human book of human wisdom and would lose its authority and power for the congregation. Bryan Chapell correctly identifies the problem of denying the ultimate authority of the Bible by stating:

Without an ultimate authority for truth all human striving has no ultimate value and life itself becomes futile. Modern trends in preaching that deny the authority of the Word in the name of intellectual sophistication lead to a despairing subjectivism in which people do what is right in their own eyes—a state whose futility Scripture has already clearly articulated (Judges 21:25).<sup>6</sup>

So the response to the challenge of subjectivism or of relativism should be “the Bible’s

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<sup>5</sup> Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 23.

<sup>6</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 22.

claim of authority.”<sup>7</sup> Without having confidence in the authority of the Bible, preaching can “become an endless search for topics, therapies, and techniques that will win approval, promote acceptance, advance a cause, or soothe worry.”<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, only when preaching is truly “biblical,” can the authority of the Bible remains center stage in the congregation’s lives. Because when the Bible loses its authority, it will lose its power for the congregation. Sidney Greidanus rightly explains the significance of biblical preaching.

People make decisions based on what God says rather than what humanity says; preachers are forced to speak about as great a variety of topics as the texts they use; the Bible’s own authority remains center stage; the preacher’s and people’s loyalty to (and knowledge of) the precise statement of Scripture grows; Scripture becomes the judge of life and not vice versa.<sup>9</sup>

Biblical preaching, according to Haddon Robinson is not different from expository preaching, because he believes that it best “carries the force of divine authority.”<sup>10</sup> Haddon Robinson defines the expository preaching as: “The communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to hearers.”<sup>11</sup>

Expository preaching, according Haddon Robinson, is textual, but not necessarily exegetical, if we understand that an exegetical sermon is to preach the biblical text verse-by-verse, line-by-line. In expository preaching, the purpose of the sermon is to help the

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Sydney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 129.

<sup>10</sup> Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 19.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 20.

congregation interpret its situation from the perspective of the gospel through the lens of a biblical passage or theme. Haddon Robinson's expository preaching is different from the typical exegetical preaching. He provides guiding principles for expository preaching. "The definition...the idea is derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context. This deals with how the preacher comes to his message and, second, with how he communicates it."<sup>12</sup> For that reason, the expositor "deals largely with an explanation of Scripture, so that he focuses the listener's attention on the Bible."<sup>13</sup>

However, David Buttrick takes a different stand from most evangelical understanding of biblical preaching. He also acknowledges that the biblical text makes an important contribution to the sermon, but he insists that it should not dominate the sermon and should not be the "imperial ruler of the homiletical realm."<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the preacher need not, according to Buttrick, "expound texts slavishly week by week.... What is essential in scripture is the story of God-with us, and not discrete texts basking in their own inerrancy."<sup>15</sup> By contending that the authority should be on the gospel, not on the Bible, Buttrick separates the gospel message from the Bible, even though the preacher gets the gospel of Christ from the Bible. His argument obviously causes some discord from evangelical scholars. David Larsen's question can be applied to Buttrick's argument. David Larson says: "The focus of authority on this sea of subjectivity is ostensibly *Solus Christ!*

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>14</sup> Ronald J. Allen, ed., *Preaching as a Theological Task*, 181.

<sup>15</sup> David Buttrick, *Speaking Parables: A Homiletic Guide* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2000), 403.

But without the indefectible authority of Scripture we must inquire: Which Christ?"<sup>16</sup>

Therefore David Buttrick's assertion is problematic. If we follow his assertion, the gospel message would vary according to the subjective interpretations of the interpreters, because the gospel message in the Bible does not claim its authority. And the gospel message will lose its authority and so lose its power. We also question how we receive the gospel, if we do not put full authority on the Bible. We believe that God is perfect and God's words are perfect. So if we believe that the Bible is God's self-revelation, it should be consistent in its theological points, and not contradictory in its message and truthfulness. Our difficulty in understanding the biblical historicity's discrepancy and logical inconsistency is not the fault of the Bible, but our lack of knowledge and understanding of the original message or the cultures in which it was written. Of course we don't have to be literalistic in our understanding of the Bible. We recognize that biblical literalism can limit our understanding and imagination. But we also should avoid the pitfalls of putting human logicality or rationality on the Bible itself.

When preaching is not biblical, its authenticity is lost, for the Bible is the source of the authority for biblical preaching. When the authority of the Bible is rejected for any reason, the biblical message or interpretations can be rejected as merely human and in that sense its power can be seriously weakened.

At this point what we need to consider is that the Bible is the church's book. The Bible continues to be the only authoritative book for preaching. But the Bible has its own authority and authenticity because it is a God-inspired book for the church. Certainly the

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<sup>16</sup> Larsen, *Anatomy of Preaching*, 29.

church should not claim its authority over the Bible, but the Bible itself tells its authority.

Biblical preaching is Bible-centered preaching. Biblical preaching makes a great endeavor to follow the lead of the biblical text, in its content and form. The Bible bears witness to itself as the written word of God, so the biblical sermon is always faithful to the message of the biblical text.

### Sermon Purpose

Biblical preaching takes the biblical writer's intention as its purpose, therefore the writer's purpose for the text is of sole importance in biblical preaching. In biblical preaching, the intention of the biblical writer is always important, because only when a sermon is faithful to what the text intends to deliver, can it be biblical. If the preacher fails to deliver the intended message of the biblical text, it cannot be biblical, even though the sermon uses a biblical text, or even quotes numerous biblical verses. Fred Craddock's statement reflects this thought clearly:

It is possible that a sermon that buries itself in the text, moves through it phrase by phrase, and never comes up for air may prove to be "unbiblical" in the sense that it fails to achieve what the text achieves. On the other hand, a sermon may appear to be walking alongside rather than through a text, or may seem to pause now and then to look up at the lofty peak of a text so extraordinary as to defy the skills of the most experienced preacher, and yet be quite "biblical" in the sense of releasing that text to do its work among the listeners.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, the preacher explores what the text says and what the text means. Even though what the text says is not always different from what it means, sometimes what the writer means is hidden from the superficial reading. Therefore, the purpose of the text should be

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<sup>17</sup> Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 28.

examined and explored with careful reading and appropriate tools to analyze the biblical text thoroughly.

As stated above, the purpose of the sermon is decided by the purpose and intention of the biblical passage. In biblical preaching what the writer of the Bible intends to say will decide the purpose and the goal of the preaching. In his explanation of evangelical hermeneutics, David Larsen implies that the intention of the biblical text should decide the purpose of the sermon: “In any case, hermeneutical findings must all be justified from the text itself seen in its context.”<sup>18</sup> So the preacher should be “clear not only about the message but also about the purpose of each sermon.”<sup>19</sup> If the preacher fails to grasp the purpose of the biblical author, the message cannot be correctly delivered to the congregation.

In biblical preaching, the purpose of the text, not the intention of the preacher or the needs of the congregation, should be always considered first. The purpose of the sermon comes from what the biblical writer intended to say, not from the preacher’s theology or agenda, or from the congregation’s demands or desires. Therefore, the biblical message should not take a mere supporting role for the preacher’s intention, but vice versa.

Our basic assumption regarding the purpose of the text is that the unity of the Bible is not uniformity in theology but consistency in theology and interpretation and perspective. So, the preacher can determine the purpose of each sermon by “discovering the purpose behind the passage” that is being preached. Haddon Robinson, in explaining the significance of the sermon’s purpose, provides what the preacher should ask and what the

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<sup>18</sup> Larsen, *Anatomy of Preaching*, 161.

<sup>19</sup> Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 109.

preacher should seek: “Why did the author write this? What effect did he expect it to have on his readers? An expository sermon, therefore, finds its purpose in line with the biblical purpose. The expositor must first figure out why a particular passage was included in the Bible, and with this in mind decide what God desires to accomplish through the sermon to his hearers today.”<sup>20</sup>

But some scholars argue that the Bible is not final, not a complete form, so the interpreter can use the Bible and interpret it differently according to their own theology. For them the gospel, not the Bible, is key to their preaching. David Buttrick argues that a sermon can be “biblical” only when it is faithful to the gospel.<sup>21</sup> He contends that the gospel is Jesus and his crucifixion and resurrection, even though we know the gospel of Jesus mostly through the Bible. Leander Keck is in line with Buttrick when he says, “Not everything in the Bible is theologically sound or morally binding just because it is in the Bible.”<sup>22</sup> He thinks that the gospel message is not necessarily contained in every biblical text. He rather contends that some passages in the Bible do contain the gospel, but some do not. He even states that occasional texts oppose the gospel.

Biblical preaching is focused on the intention of the biblical writer. Thomas G. Long rightly claims,

Bearing witness to the gospel means engaging in serious and responsible biblical preaching. Preaching is biblical whenever the preacher allows a text from the Bible to serve as the leading force in shaping the content and purpose of the sermon. . . . Biblical preaching does not mean merely talking about the Bible, using the Bible to bolster doctrinal arguments, or applying biblical ‘principles’ to everyday life. Biblical preaching

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Here gospel is not Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; it is the core of the biblical message.

<sup>22</sup> Keck, *The Bible in the Pulpit*, 121.

happens when a preacher prayerfully listens to the Bible on behalf of the people and then speaks on Christ's behalf what he or she hears there. Biblical preaching has almost nothing to do with how many times the Bible is quoted in a sermon and everything to do with how faithfully the Bible is interpreted in relation to contemporary experience.<sup>23</sup>

Even the biblical passages that seem to be against our contemporary idea or customs should be handled fairly, because our contemporary reason and culture cannot refuse the Bible and cannot supersede the biblical message. This aspect can be equally applied to the evangelical preachers. They also have an inclination to put more emphasis on the evangelical agenda than on the biblical purpose and intention of the text. Therefore “the object of the Scriptures’ attention must be the object of our attention, recognizably so.”<sup>24</sup>

Preaching depends on the preacher’s interpretations of the Bible. But, preaching is first of all listening to the Bible and delivering the message of the Bible, the intention of the biblical text. In biblical preaching the Bible should not be a mere reference or footnote of the preacher’s agenda. In order to avoid that trap preaching should be biblical, and faithful to the intention of the biblical writer. The purpose of the biblical writer should prevail in preaching. There are no exceptions.

### **Christ-centered Preaching**

Our fundamental belief is that the core message of the Bible is Christ. The Bible’s main theme is Christ. Christ is a main Character of the Bible. Therefore, even though we know Christ from the Bible, the Bible cannot outdo Christ, because the core message of the Bible

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<sup>23</sup> Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 48.

<sup>24</sup> Charles L. Bartow, *God’s Human Speech: A Practical Theology of Proclamation* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1997), 58.

is Christ and the Bible exists for Christ. Christ does not exist for the Bible. The “proper interpretation of any part of the Bible requires us to relate it to the person and work of Jesus.”<sup>25</sup> And “the unity of redemptive history (of the Bible) implies the Christo-centric nature of every historical text.”<sup>26</sup>

Liberal scholars have an inclination to separate Christ from the Bible. They ask if the preacher has to receive the Bible as the word of God, simply because it is the Bible. David Buttrick questions, “Is the whole Bible a book that must be preached simply because it is the Bible and somebody has labeled it as the Word of God? Do we preach to study particular biblical passages, or is preaching a theological endeavor that seeks to make sense of life now in view of God’s graciousness in Jesus Christ?”<sup>27</sup>

David Buttrick argues that the purpose of preaching is first and foremost to announce the gospel and its implication for the contemporary world. He insists that the gospel means a “concise expression of the core of the Christian faith” and that the authority of the gospel supersedes that of the Bible. For him the Bible is separated from the gospel and they are not the same, but different. So, he concludes that the word “biblical” is inappropriate for preaching. Preaching doesn’t need to be biblical, if we understand “biblical” as Bible-centered, but the Bible should be Christo-centered. Further, he says, “The fundamental intention of the sermon is not to preach the Bible or specific biblical passages. The Bible is intended to be a witness (or, better, a collection of witnesses) to the gospel. However, some

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<sup>25</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2000), 84.

<sup>26</sup> Sidney Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura: Problems and Principles in Preaching Historical Texts* (Toronto: Wedge, 1970), 135.

<sup>27</sup> David Buttrick, *A Captive Voice: The Liberation of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 11.

parts of the Bible do not articulate the gospel. In fact, some passages are anti-gospel.”<sup>28</sup> For Buttrick, while the Bible is not the whole story of Christ and the church, it is the constitutive story, the story of the church in Israel transformed by Jesus Christ. So Buttrick says that the pastor can preach the gospel without working with a biblical text.<sup>29</sup> The reason why the preacher preaches the Bible is that it tells about Christ.

Then, our question for Buttrick is this: If we do not consider the Bible as the source of the gospel, how do we know that Christ is the core of the gospel? The preacher delivers Jesus Christ, as revealed to us in the Bible. Paul Scott Wilson is right when he says, “We know that the One we have met is Christ because of the testimony of Scripture, which confirms that this is the same Jesus who died and is risen. And we believe Scripture because through it we are led to Christ and to God’s love.”<sup>30</sup>

Bryan Chapell, an evangelical scholar, correctly explains the significance of the Christ-centered preaching as: “Proper exposition does not discover its Christ-focus by disposing of any passage or by imposing Jesus on the text, but by discerning the place and role of the text in the entire revelation of God’s redemptive plan.”<sup>31</sup> Charles Bartow agrees by saying, “We have the Bible because it has taken hold of us through its ‘unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ.’ We have it, too, because Jesus Christ himself bears unique and authoritative witness to it. God has spoken, and God has promised to speak again. So we read the Bible and preach from it in faith and hope.”<sup>32</sup>

Even though the preacher has many themes for preaching, the preacher always has to

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<sup>28</sup> Allen, *Preaching as a Theological Task*, 177.

<sup>29</sup> Buttrick, *A Captive Voice*, 405.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Scott Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 125.

<sup>31</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 292.

<sup>32</sup> Bartow, *God’s Human Speech*, 46.

examine and evaluate the sermon to see if it is based on Jesus Christ, who is the core of the gospel. The redemptive work of Christ is the overarching theme of the Bible and so a sermon should be measured if it is biblical preaching. If a sermon fails to serve that overarching theme it cannot be biblical. So Bryan Chapell's argument is right when he says, "A passage retains its Christocentric focus, and a sermon becomes Christ-centered, not because the preacher finds a slick way of wedging a reference to Jesus' person or work into the message but because the sermon identifies a function this particular text legitimately serves in the great drama of the Son's crusade against the serpent."<sup>33</sup> Bryan Chapell also warns us: "The mature view of Christ-centered preaching warns preachers not to believe they have properly expounded a text simply because they have identified something in it that reminds them of an event in Jesus' life and ministry."<sup>34</sup>

Therefore, in preaching Jesus Christ is the sole figure that the preacher proclaims. In that sense, as long as he is focusing on the person and work of Jesus Christ, David Buttrick correctly insists, "So, yes, we may turn to the Bible as faith seeks understanding. But, here the question: Must we begin every sermon with some Bible passage? After all, we are exploring the meaning of life in view of God revealed in Christ Jesus, a task that is essentially theological. So what is the rationale for preaching a biblical passage?"<sup>35</sup> But, unlike Buttrick's assumption that a preacher is not able to separate Christ from the Bible, some scholars have thought they could and have actually tried to separate the two.

Certainly we have the Bible because it tells of Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ is

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<sup>33</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 293.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Buttrick, *A Captive Voice*, 15ff.

witnessed in the Bible uniquely and authoritatively. Charles Bartow correctly says about the relation between Jesus Christ and the Bible, “We have it (the Bible), too, because Jesus Christ himself bears unique and authoritative witness to it. God has spoken, and God has promised to speak again. So we read the Bible and preach from it in faith and hope.”<sup>36</sup> Bartow continues, “To understand the Bible correctly requires faith in Christ along with the Spirit’s enlightenment. Christ is revealed as the meaning of the Scriptures so that no part can be rightly understood without reference to him.”<sup>37</sup>

In line with Charles Bartow, Article III of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics says: “We affirm that the Person and work of Jesus Christ are the central focus of the entire Bible.”<sup>38</sup> Nobody can deny that the core message of the Bible should be Jesus Christ. If a sermon fails to deliver the message of Jesus Christ, it is not a Christian message at all. And the Holy Spirit proves it. “God’s dialogic engagement of preacher and congregants (God’s speech and silence, God’s claim and succor) in Jesus Christ—crucified, risen, regnant—as he is attested for us in Scripture through the agency of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>39</sup>

Here what we need to note is the trend to separate historical Jesus from the Christ of faith, which has been occurring in the liberal area. About this trend, Charles Bartow correctly mentions:

As G. B. Caird and L. D. Hurst note, it is an error to assume that the Jesus of history is a different person from the Christ of the church’s faith: The New Testament writers . . . put enormous weight upon the actuality of the events they describe. “We cannot give up speaking of the things we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). “This is supported by an eyewitness, whose evidence is to be trusted” (John 19:35). The Fourth Gospel uses a

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<sup>36</sup> Bartow, *God’s Human Speech*, 46.

<sup>37</sup> Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 85.

<sup>38</sup> Earl D. Radmacher and D. Preus, eds., *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 882.

<sup>39</sup> Bartow, *God’s Human Speech*, 138.

blind man to convey that approach to simple fact that always triumphs over dogmatic theorizing: “All I know is this: once I was blind, but now I see” (John 9:25). Luke’s Gospel begins with the claim that the author was “following the traditions handed down to us by the original eyewitnesses” (Luke 1:2). Those aspiring to apostleship were required to have been eyewitnesses (Acts 1:21-2). And the terms *euaggelizo* and *kerusso*<sup>40</sup> connote the proclamation of news, not an invitation to a mystical, creative experience.<sup>40</sup>

Another question is about how we can apply the person and work of Jesus Christ to the biblical verses of the Old Testament. It is clear that Christ is the central focus in the entire Bible. In regard to the Old Testament, Jesus is the center of the message, even though Christ is not directly mentioned in some biblical texts. The redemptive message of the Christ penetrates the message of the sermon. Graeme Goldsworthy correctly insists that the gospel should be the methodological starting point for the interpretation of the Old Testament because “the person of Jesus is proclaimed as the final and fullest expression of God’s revelation of his kingdom. Jesus is the goal and fulfillment of the whole Old Testament and, as the embodiment of the truth of God; he is the interpretative key to the Bible. Another reason for beginning with Jesus Christ is that that is where our faith journey begins.”<sup>41</sup>

Jesus is the core message for the entire Bible as David Larsen writes, “The Christian proclaimer, whether preaching from the Old Testament or the New, must present Christ as the ultimate frame of reference.”<sup>42</sup> “But our preaching of any part of Scripture must stand within a clear sense of theological construct, and for the Christian proclaimer that construct is Christocentric.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> G. B. Caird, *New Testament Theology*, completed and ed. L. D. Hurst (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 348; Bartow, *God’s Human Speech*, 56-57.

<sup>41</sup> Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 25.

<sup>42</sup> Larsen, *Anatomy of Preaching*, 163.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 164.

## Relevancy to the Congregation

Our fourth criterion of biblical preaching is its relevancy to the congregation.

Relevancy of biblical preaching is tested by its application to the congregation. As David Larsen points out, the purpose of the sermon “reaches beyond the accurate exposition of the biblical text. The sermon which starts in the Bible and stays in the Bible is not biblical.”<sup>44</sup> The biblical, homiletical message should be relevantly applied to the congregation’s situation. Without relevant application to the congregation a sermon is “like a banquet without silverware.”<sup>45</sup> In biblical preaching, exposition of the biblical text and its application to the congregation’s context are intertwined and so should not be considered separately. When a sermon loses its relevancy to the congregation, it is “like strangers passing in the night.”<sup>46</sup>

No matter how seriously a sermon deals with the biblical text, without a congregation, preaching is meaningless, because preaching has its meaning only for the congregation, not for the preacher. Biblical preaching does not ignore the reality that preaching is primarily for the congregation. If a sermon fails to be effectively delivered to the congregation and to meet their needs it cannot be a biblical sermon. A sermon cannot be superficial and temporal, but fundamental and eternal. No matter how thoroughly a sermon expounds the biblical text, if it fails to be delivered to the congregation relevantly, it cannot be biblical preaching at all. Preaching is ultimately for the congregation, even though the preacher

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>46</sup> David S. Dockery, “A Historical Model,” in *Hermeneutics for Preaching: Approaches to Contemporary Interpretation of Scripture*, ed. Raymond Bailey (Nashville: Broadman), 49.

wrestles with the Bible, and he or she is the first person to be influenced by the biblical message.

Paul Scott Wilson, in his book *The Practice of Preaching*, adequately explains that the purpose of the sermon is determined by the intention of the biblical writer and its relevant application to the congregation's context. When it loses its relevancy to the congregation, it is not different from biblical commentary, and so it cannot be a sermon. Wilson provides four steps to preparing a sermon. His own tool, "hermeneutical square," explains four stages of the interpretative process.<sup>47</sup>

1. What the text says (understanding)
2. What the text means (explanation)
3. What the experience says (application)
4. What the preacher says (purpose)

Regarding the application of the Bible to the congregation's context, the preacher asks relevant questions such as: "How can the historical meaning and contemporary significance be communicated to our contemporary world?" "How will the text be heard and understood today?" "What did the text mean to the contemporary reader?" "What cultural factors need to be contextualized or retranslated?" "What is the theological significance of the passage for the congregation?"

In his preaching, Jesus set a good example of a biblical sermon by considering and focusing on the congregation's need, but not pandering to their superficial desires. Jesus taught the people, challenged the people and led the people to where he intended to lead

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<sup>47</sup> Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching*, 126ff.

them. Jesus was always sensitive to the voice of the people and never neglected their outcries, and in that sense his sermon always was relevant to the congregation's context.

A sermon that stays only in the Bible and fails going beyond that point is not biblically right. As David Larsen notes, "The sermon which starts in the Bible and stays in the Bible is not biblical." Therefore, biblical preaching seriously considers the relevancy of the sermon to the congregation. When a sermon becomes biblically accurate and faithful to the biblical text, it has its own relevance to today's world and it has authenticity, because biblical preaching focuses on the particularity of the biblical context (intention of the writer) and so applies the universality of the biblical truth (relevance) of the Bible to the particular world (congregation's context).

The relevancy of preaching, or application of the text for today should always be seriously considered by the preacher, because biblical preaching is intended to help the congregation participate in the biblical world and to learn from the experiences of the original hearers of the Bible. The preacher uses a variety of methods in preaching: encouraging, empowering, envisioning, and engaging the people.

In applying the message of the text to the congregation's context, the main thought of the text should be the main thought of the application.<sup>48</sup> Telling a few stories or illustrations about the congregation's life does not mean that it can claim its relevancy to the congregation. The hermeneutical task of preaching the Bible in a way that is biblical requires theological analysis and interpretation of today's congregation. Without considering the congregation's context carefully, we may manage to escape the context and

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<sup>48</sup> Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 18.

the Bible stays within the Bible.

The relevancy of preaching to the congregation starts with exploring the historical, literary setting of the biblical text, because we believe that the biblical message was relevant to its original hearers. Therefore a sermon's relevancy to the congregation starts with a thorough analysis and interpretation of the biblical text. Application of the biblical message to the congregation's context is more than an add-on to the sermon. Application of the sermon "draws from the text a meaning for life as it is being lived."<sup>49</sup> Therefore when a sermon loses its relevancy to the congregation, it cannot be a biblical sermon. Charles Bartow correctly writes,

Of course biblical preaching is not a response to human urgings or needs. Biblical preaching is a "response 'to the demands of the eternal will . . . as they make themselves heard in the determinate situation' where preaches and their congregants stand. A *Christian interpretation of life*, therefore, is not an exploration into the relevance of the gospel to the exigencies of the moment. It is, instead, a 'read' of those exigencies in terms of their relevance to the gospel of Christ as the prophetic and apostolic witness attests him."<sup>50</sup>

### **Definition of Biblical Preaching**

Preaching listens to and speaks for the message of the Bible. So the Bible rules and directs the preaching. The ultimate criterion of biblical preaching is the Bible itself. Fred Craddock correctly states, "The Bible itself determines when preaching is biblical, just as it is Mozart who determines when music is Mozarcean."<sup>51</sup> As Haddon Robinson writes, "To

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<sup>49</sup> Larsen, *Anatomy of Preaching*, 96.

<sup>50</sup> Bartow, *God's Human Speech*, 136.

<sup>51</sup> Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, revised and with new sermons (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2001), 27.

be truly biblical the major assertions supporting the sermon's basic concept must also be taken from the passage on which it is based.”<sup>52</sup>

No one should claim to monopolize the authority and authenticity of biblical interpretation. Only the Bible itself will determine what sermon is biblical and biblically sound. So the primary task of the preacher is to be faithful to the Bible and to know the intention of the biblical text throughout the entire process of sermon writing.

Regarding the definition of biblical preaching, there are diverse understandings and opinions. But in spite of the subjectivity of judgment and definition, we can have some agreeable definitions of biblical preaching. Here are suggested principles for biblical preaching. Biblical preaching is Bible-centered, Bible-based, and so explores the meaning of the biblical text in its original historical, literary, and linguistic context. Exegesis considers the questions, problems, and concerns of the original hearers and how the biblical writer addressed them.

Biblical preaching thoroughly analyzes the biblical text and explores the original meaning. Even though a sermon deals with a biblical subject, if it does not tackle the biblical text seriously, it is not biblical. The Bible itself is the criterion for what makes preaching biblical. So biblical preaching always tries to understand a passage's original meaning.

Biblical preaching is faithful to the purpose of the biblical writers. If preaching fails to deliver the purpose of the biblical text, it is not biblical preaching. So biblical preaching

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<sup>52</sup> Haddon W. Robinson, “Homiletics and Hermeneutics,” in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 804.

always is concerned with the intention of the biblical writers, interpreting it accurately and faithfully proclaiming it. For the comprehensive understanding of the original meaning and setting of the text, preaching should be biblically faithful and accurate, and this fact should not be ignored under any condition.

Biblical preaching adequately applies the message of the Bible to the world of the congregation. Preachers should identify contemporary situations, problems, and questions that are analogous to those faced by the Bible's original congregation. Biblical preaching should relevantly apply the biblical message and demonstrate the enduring power of the Holy Spirit by the relevant application of the biblical message. Biblical preaching effectively helps the congregation connect with people in the Bible.

In preaching the Bible, the erosion of commitment to biblical authority should be stopped. Without full commitment to biblical authority preaching cannot claim its authority and will lose the power to change the lives of the congregation. The Bible always should be the norm of preaching, because the Bible bears witness to the presence and power of God.

The goal of biblical interpretation for preaching is to lead the congregation so they can encounter the presence and work of God through the Holy Spirit in their daily lives as well as in the Bible and to encourage them to live as living parables of the kingdom of God. Therefore biblical preaching is an exciting, energizing and galvanizing event for the church and the congregation. Karl Barth says that when preaching is biblical, it can be an exciting moment for preachers and congregations.

Preachers must not be boring. To a large extent the pastor and boredom are synonymous concepts. Listeners often think that they have already heard what is being said in the pulpit. . . . Against boredom the only defense is being biblical. If a sermon is biblical, it will not be boring. Holy scripture is in fact so interesting and has so much that is new

and exciting to tell us that listeners cannot even think about dropping off to sleep.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Karl Barth, *Homiletics*, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley and Donald E. Daniels (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 80.

## CHAPTER 4

### BIBLICAL SERMON FORM

Form is the basic way to communicate with others. It is not possible to have an idea without its form. Through form we deliver our ideas. Our communication depends on both its idea and its form, on both together and not on either of them alone. The only question is “what form?”<sup>1</sup>

A sermon is used to deliver ideas and images and in that sense it is delivered only in the form. The congregation hears the sermon through the form. Sermon form is critical in biblical preaching, because preaching is affected by sermon form. The primary purpose of this chapter will be to examine and explore what a biblically adequate sermon form is. However, in this chapter presenting a particular method of sermon construction is not our goal. This chapter aims rather at providing an apparatus for biblical sermon form. Our basic assumption is that there is a biblically more adequate sermon form among many forms, and so we in this chapter will be exploring a biblically adequate sermon form. We will ask what form of sermon is biblically proper to the Bible and to the congregation. Even though there is no God-approved method of delivering the message of the gospel, we can expect to have a more effective way to deliver a sermon, if we agree that preaching is a means of communication.

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Grady Davis, *Design for Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958). He comments that the difference between “chaotic thought and ordered thought is not the difference between no form and form; it is the difference between confused form and all organized form . . . the only question is, what form?” (see 3ff.).

## **Significance of the Form in a Sermon**

Sermon form is significant in preaching. But there have been negative responses to the sermon form. Karl Barth in his book *Homiletic* states that “there is no need to consider the problem of what should come first, second, and third. The preacher has only to repeat what the text says.”<sup>2</sup> His rejection of sermon form is connected with his theology that human factors can do nothing in establishing the Word of God and should not try to do so.

A sermon should not be defined by the sermon form, but by content and purpose of the sermon. Sermon form is a part of the sermon. Therefore Fred Craddock says, “The form of...a sermon is therefore a part of the warp and woof of the message itself and was not laid as a grid over the message, alien to it and rising from another source.”<sup>3</sup> Davis Grady wisely identifies the problem of not having an appropriate sermon form as, “A greater danger is that the preacher will be concerned only about the content of his preaching, will never in his life study form enough to begin to master it, and will never become the preacher he has it in him to be.”<sup>4</sup> Thomas Long rightly defines the function of the form in a sermon as “an organizational plan for deciding what kinds of things will be said and done in a sermon and in what sequence.”<sup>5</sup> Therefore we can say that sermon form “is as important to the flow and direction of a sermon as are the banks of a river to the movement of its current.”<sup>6</sup>

Sermon form reshapes the form of the text. Thomas Long also writes, “Sermon forms

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Barth, *Homiletics*, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley and Donald E. Daniels (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 121.

<sup>3</sup> Keith Willhite and Scott M. Gibson, eds., *Big Idea Preaching: Connecting the Bible to People* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 169.

<sup>4</sup> Davis, *Design for Preaching*, 10.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 93.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 92.

are not innocent or neutral. The shape of a sermon is not merely a convenient and logical way to arrange content; it is an invitation to--perhaps even a demand upon--the hearers to listen to the content according to a particular form.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore when we are ignorant of the significance of sermon form, the message of the biblical text can be negatively influenced. So Sidney Greidanus writes, “The significance of sermon form becomes evident when one realizes that this shaping will distort the text’s message unless it is done with sensitivity to the text’s form.”<sup>8</sup>

Fred Craddock understands the sermon form as theological. He writes, “It should be emphasized that the separation of method of preaching from theology of preaching is a violation, leaving not one but two orphans. Not only content of preaching but method of preaching is fundamentally a theological consideration.”<sup>9</sup> He also writes, “The method is the message. So is it with all preaching: how one preaches is to a large extent what one preaches.”<sup>10</sup> He correctly points out the lack of understanding of the significance of sermon form and emphasizes the significance of sermon form:

Form shapes the listener’s faith. It is likely that few preachers are aware how influential sermon form is on the quality of the parishioners’ faith. . . . Form is so extremely important. Regardless of the subjects being treated, a preacher can’t hereby nourish rigidity or openness, legalism or graciousness, inclusiveness or exclusiveness, adversarial or conciliating mentality, willingness to discuss or demand immediate answers.<sup>11</sup>

So, Thomas Long is right when he says, “A sermon’s form should grow out of the shape of

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>8</sup> Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 141.

<sup>9</sup> Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, revised and with new sermons (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2001), 43-44.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>11</sup> Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 173-74.

the gospel being proclaimed as well as out of the listening patterns of those who will hear the sermon.”<sup>12</sup>

It matters to biblical preaching what form will be developed and delivered, because sermon form and sermon theology are related, not separated, matters. Paul Scott Wilson writes, “Sermon form imposes a theology on the sermon in ways that affect biblical interpretation.”<sup>13</sup> Sermon form and sermon content cannot be separated. So Thomas Long urges the preacher to consider the sermon form and content closely connected rather than as separate realities. He says, “it is far more accurate to speak of the form of the content.”<sup>14</sup>

It is obvious that there is no one-size-fits-all sermon form. A single form of sermon should not dominate over biblical preaching. Certainly a variety of sermon forms can be practiced. According to preachers different sermon forms can be applied to biblical passages. Traditionally preachers are accustomed to three points and a poem, but preachers can have their own form of exegesis, exposition, and application. Fred Craddock explains, “In fact, forms of preaching should be as varied as the forms of rhetoric in the New Testament, or as the purposes of preaching or as the situations of those who listen.”<sup>15</sup>

Sermon form is primarily related to the idea of the sermon rather than to the form of the text. But many sermon forms are possible for the preacher. Our approach to sermon form will be as varied as the genre of the Bible, possibly more varied, because today we have more diverse literary, rhetoric forms. However, we believe that a sermon can be

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<sup>12</sup> Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 105.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Scott Wilson, *Biblical Studies and Preaching*, in *Preaching as a Theological Task: World, Gospel, Scripture, In Honor of David Buttrick*, ed. Thomas G. Long and Edward Farley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 146.

<sup>14</sup> Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 97.

<sup>15</sup> Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 45.

contextually more appropriate, when it has a biblically adequate sermon form.

Many forms and patterns of sermons have been experimented with and practiced by preachers. Those sermon forms can be classified into two axes: content and movement. In terms of its content, a sermon tends to be either an expository sermon, or a topical sermon.<sup>16</sup> In regard to movement, a sermon tends to be deductive or inductive. In a deductive sermon, the preacher makes the major point of the sermon near the beginning. Then the preacher develops that point. Directness and clarity are major strengths of deductive preaching. But deductive sermons run the risk of being dull. They do not create suspense and tension that keep congregations involved. The inductive sermon delays the major point or conclusion until the latter part of the sermon. The message begins with questions or issues that need to be interpreted from the viewpoint of gospel. The sermon is a journey of exploration and discovery. Inductive preaching creates tension. The inductive movement creates tension that helps the congregation want to be involved in the sermon.

Our view of the Bible defines our biblical theology, sermon form and content. There are different shapes of sermons from preachers who put total authority on the Bible and preachers who are open-ended to the truthfulness of the Bible. But, a sermon that is overly vague and open-ended does not keep good company with the Bible. Thomas Long correctly thinks that the utterly open-ended sermon may be a betrayal of the gospel itself.<sup>17</sup> However, a biblical sermon does not have to have a specific form of sermon. In terms of sermon form, difference does not necessarily come from the theological differences. The

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<sup>16</sup> Ronald J. Allen, ed., *Patterns of Preaching: A Sermon Sampler* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 1998), x.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas G. Long, interview by author, tape recording, Princeton, New Jersey, 6 August 1996.

fundamental difference in the understanding of the Bible makes the preacher lean on specific sermon forms, even though he or she practices diverse styles of sermons in their preaching.

### **The Form Faithful to the Biblical Text**

A variety of forms and patterns of preaching have come and gone. But, if we agree that preaching is nothing but the listening for and speaking for the Bible, the preacher will take the form or genre of the text into serious consideration. A sermon should always be faithful to the text. Without being faithful to the content of the biblical passage, a sermon cannot be biblical.

The definition of “faithful to the text” varies among different interpretations. According to liberals, a biblically faithful sermon does not necessarily stay in the biblical passage. For that purpose knowing the writer’s intention is critical. Evangelical interpreters agree that a sermon should be analyzed and given a thorough interpretation on the biblical text, if it is to remain a biblically faithful sermon.

The form of the biblical text influences the form of the sermon. This means that we must carefully pay attention to genre and its function in the text. Don Wardlaw correctly insists: “If it is a good sermon, it does not break rules; it breaks only the unnecessary and artificial rules.”<sup>18</sup> Whatever the genre or genres selected, the first requirement for a sermon is biblical text. Certainly a sermon is not biblical simply because it addresses a theme in the Bible. Quoting numerous biblical verses doesn’t make a sermon a biblical sermon. Biblical

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<sup>18</sup> Don M. Wardlaw, ed., *Preaching Biblically: Creating Sermons in the Shape of Scripture* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 11.

preaching is more than that. And if someone uses the biblical text just here and there, it is not biblical preaching.

When considering a biblical sermon the genre of the text bears a direct relationship to sermon form. The form of a text ought to have some influence on the form of the sermon. We must “decide how to preach so that the sermon embodies in its language, form and style the gospel it seeks to proclaim.”<sup>19</sup> The essential connection between the form of the text and the sermon cannot be ignored, as Amos Wilder insists, “Shape and substance are inseparable and mutually determinative.”<sup>20</sup>

Here is where we ask how closely the form or genre of the text has to do with the sermon form. According to Dietrich Ritschl, the form of the sermon should be “totally determined by the text.”<sup>21</sup> Even his verse-by-verse commentary approach is a kind of sermon form. Some people have gone so far as to suggest that the form of the text determines sermon form. John Holbert says that the best expression of a narrative is a narrative.<sup>22</sup> Henry Mitchell says, “To select a form or vehicle different from the one inherent in a given text is to do violence to its divinely intended meaning, since meaning and form are inseparable. Thus a narrative parable text demands a narrative sermon form.”<sup>23</sup> However, Fred Craddock notes that sermon shape does not have to come from the

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas G. Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 12.

<sup>20</sup> Amos N. Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 25.

<sup>21</sup> Dietrich Ritschl, *A Theology of Proclamation* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1960), 141.

<sup>22</sup> Ronald J. Allen and John C. Holbert, *Holy Root and Holy Branches: Christian Preaching from the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 153.

<sup>23</sup> Henry Mitchell, “The Hearer’s Experience of the Word,” in *Listening to the Word*, ed. Gail R. O’Day and Thomas G. Long (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 223.

form of the text, “A text that is a prayer does not necessitate a sermon in prayer form.”<sup>24</sup>

But the form of the text should be primarily considered. Greidanus suggests that the goal of sermon form is “respect for the text,” rather than copying. Ronald Allen agrees: “The form of the sermon should respect the form of the text.”<sup>25</sup>

Preaching should faithfully explain the text. For this purpose, the best preaching method is expository, because in an expository sermon the preacher interprets the congregation’s context from the perspective of the biblical text. Graeme Goldworthy says, “Expository preaching is essentially the practice of explaining the meaning of a passage of Scripture.”<sup>26</sup> Bryan Chapell explains the necessity of the expository sermon, because an expository sermon, he thinks, has the main idea and the main points all from the text itself. He says that in the expository sermon “no significant portion of the text is ignored. In other words, expositors willingly stay within the boundaries of a text and do not leave until they have surveyed its entirely with their listeners.”<sup>27</sup>

There has been confusion about the difference between textual preaching and expository preaching. According to preachers who are interested in this issue, the difference is a matter of length of the biblical text. They think that a textual sermon has a text of one to three verses. A lengthier text classifies the sermon as expository. But there is some disagreement about this classification. Some homiletics insist that a textual sermon is an extension, if the topical sermon draws both its topic and its divisions from the biblical text.

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<sup>24</sup> Craddock, *Preaching*, 178.

<sup>25</sup> Allen and Holbert, *Holy Root and Holy Branches*, 35.

<sup>26</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2000), 120.

<sup>27</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 128.

William Thomson adequately explains “that the terms expository preaching and textual preaching are at least worthless—perhaps dangerous, if they keep us from understanding what biblical preaching is.”<sup>28</sup>

William Thompson clarifies the difference between expository preaching and topical preaching. “It was an expository sermon; when only the main points came from the Bible, it was textual preaching; and when the points came from one’s own brain, the preaching was topical.”<sup>29</sup> However, as Francis C. Rossow points out, the use of the terms “expository” and “topical” is different according to different homilicians and used loosely.<sup>30</sup> Sidney Greidanus agrees.

The term expository preaching cannot truly be contrasted with textual preaching or preaching on a single verse, since these terms describe preaching from different angles. Instead of contrasting these terms, therefore, one can easily combine them. . . . extual preaching is preaching on biblical text and expounds the message of that text. This definition implies that all textual preaching requires not only a text but also an exposition of that text. All textual preaching is therefore understood as expository preaching.<sup>31</sup>

Perhaps the traditionally topical sermon has been the most popular form among preachers. Nobody can deny the strengths of topical preaching. It helps the congregation understand the topic from the perspective of the gospel. However, topical preaching does not center on the exposition of the Bible in the same way as the expository sermon. A topical sermon begins with a theme and goal in the mind of the preacher. The preacher freely chooses a text from the Bible, and often the text takes a limited role rather than a

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<sup>28</sup> William D. Thompson, *Preaching Biblically: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 9-10.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Duduit, “Topical Preaching,” in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 84.

<sup>31</sup> Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 123.

major role in the preaching. Mostly a topical sermon takes only its topic from the passage. The problem with the topical sermon is fairly pointed out by Bryan Chapell, when he says: “The (topical) sermon is organized according to the subject’s nature rather than according to the text’s distinctions. In a textual message, preachers glean the topic of the sermon and its main points from ideas in the text. A textual message reflects some of the text’s particulars in the statement of its main ideas, but the development of those main ideas comes from sources outside the immediate text.”<sup>32</sup> So, if a topical sermon does not come from the text, it is not biblical at all.

Donald Miller asserts that all preaching can be expository by saying,

If this broad definition of expository preaching be accepted, then it remains true that all real preaching is expository preaching; for if a pulpit discourse does not embody the elements included in our definition, it can hardly be classed as a sermon. . . . The ancient categories, therefore, of topical, textual, and expository are irrelevant from the standpoint of determining the biblical content of a sermon. Whatever validity they may have in the jargon of formal homiletical technique, they can do little but create mischief when they are used to delineate the relative biblical content of a sermon.<sup>33</sup>

Haddon Robinson argues that an expository sermon is the best biblical sermon form. According to him, if a sermon is faithful to the text, it will be an expository sermon, because the biblical passage takes the primary role. He contends that the best type of preaching is expository preaching, because he believes that it “carries the force of divine authority.”<sup>34</sup> He explains that the expository form of preaching is the preaching style that is faithful to the purpose of the Bible. Even though many preachers are reluctant to deliver a

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<sup>32</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 127-28.

<sup>33</sup> Donald G. Miller, *The Way to Biblical Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1958), 26.

<sup>34</sup> Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 19.

sermon in an expository way,<sup>35</sup> expository preaching is widely accepted and used by evangelical preachers, because they consider that it is a form of biblical preaching that is faithful to the intention of the Bible and relevant to the congregation's expectations. In the expository sermon, "the primary concept of the biblical text should be delivered. For this purpose the preacher is concerned not with what individual words mean, but with what the biblical writer means through his use of words."<sup>36</sup>

But, Robinson's expository preaching is different from the typical exegetical preaching, because in traditional exegetical preaching a biblical text is treated line-by-line, or verse-by-verse and so the sermon might have several foci rather than a focus. Robinson, in his book, "*Biblical Preaching*," provides five principles for expository preaching.<sup>37</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy lines up with the definitions of Robinson and Greidanus: "Expository preaching is a matter of exposing the meaning of the biblical passages as it stands in its own concept and in the wider context of the unity of Scripture."<sup>38</sup>

However, faithful exposition of the text needs "more than reading a preaching-text; textual preaching can claim divine authority only when it entails faithful exposition of the

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<sup>35</sup> Leonora Tisdale, a Princeton Theological Seminary homiletics professor, is critical of expository sermons, because she thinks that it considers a "congregation that loves verse-by-verse expository preaching, but that also has tendencies toward bibliolatry." See her *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 142.

<sup>36</sup> Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 21.

<sup>37</sup> Robinson provides five principles for the expository preaching. According to those principles, (1) the sermon from should be governed by the text, (2) the intention of the writer should be considered thoroughly, (3) The preacher gets the sermon concept from the text, not other sources, (4) and the sermon concept first should be applied to the person and personality of the preacher, and finally (5) the preacher should deliver the sermon concept to the congregation. See *Biblical Preaching*, 22ff.

<sup>38</sup> Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 120.

text.”<sup>39</sup> When one fails to interpret the Bible accurately his or her preaching cannot be biblical.

Certainly it is too much to say that biblical preaching is expository preaching, even though we see strengths in the expository sermon form. But expository preaching should be considered highly biblical, because it can deliver the biblical message faithfully to the Bible and effectively to the congregation’s situation. Expository preaching is biblical as long as the purpose of the sermon is “to help the congregation interpret its situation from the perspective of the gospel through the lens of a biblical passage or theme.”<sup>40</sup> Expository preaching can avoid the preacher’s spontaneous and volatile interpretations.

### **Being Governed by the Form of Biblical Text**

Sermon form is closely related to the original form of the biblical passage, its literary genre and its writer’s intention. If a sermon is to be a biblical sermon, the theology and method of the biblical text should govern the sermon form and structure. Haddon Robinson says that in expository preaching, the biblical passage governs the sermon, because “the thought of the biblical writer determines the substance of an expository sermon.”<sup>41</sup> Bryan Chapell advocates expository preaching, because expository preaching “takes its topic, main points, and sub points from the text.”<sup>42</sup>

In the Bible the intention of the writer comes through literary forms. As we have seen, biblical form is not separated from biblical theology. The content of the text cannot be

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<sup>39</sup> Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 124.

<sup>40</sup> Ronald J. Allen, *Preaching: Luke-Acts* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2000), 61.

<sup>41</sup> Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 20.

<sup>42</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 128.

alienated from the form of the text. Therefore, the intention of the text and the intention of the sermon will govern the choice of sermon form.

Leander Keck provides his own definition of the criteria for “biblical” preaching,

Biblical preaching will be renewed when the two elements of the word “biblical” are given their due—that is, preaching is truly biblical when (a) the Bible governs the content of the sermon and when (b) the function of the sermon is analogous to that of the text. In other words, preaching is biblical when it imparts a Bible-shaped word in a Bible-like way. Historical critical exegesis is an indispensable tool for truly biblical preaching because it illuminates both the biblical content and its function.<sup>43</sup>

Therefore the function of the preacher in the expository is, as Bryan Chapell explains, “to explain what *this* text means. The goal of such a sermon is simple: to have listeners personally understand what the passage under consideration means before they leave the service.”<sup>44</sup>

Haddon Robinson maintains that a sermon should be governed by the biblical passage, because he thinks, “The thought of the biblical writer determines the substance of an expository sermon.”<sup>45</sup> Henry Mitchell is on the same page with Haddon Robinson when he argues, “Although either text or purpose may occur first in the planning process, the prior choice of purpose (usually because of legitimate pastoral concerns) must never be allowed to override the substantive integrity of the scriptural text.”<sup>46</sup> Don Wardlaw also takes the same position with Robinson and Mitchell when he suggests, “the sermon shape should

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<sup>43</sup> Leander E. Keck, *The Bible in the Pulpit: The Renewal of Biblical Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978), 106.

<sup>44</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 128.

<sup>45</sup> Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 20.

<sup>46</sup> Henry Mitchell, *Celebration and Experience in Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 51.

derive from the content it seeks to embody and express.”<sup>47</sup>

Of course when we say that the theology and the method of the biblical text governs the sermon form and structure, it does not mean that the sermon should have the same form as the biblical text, even though the text often can provide a particular sermon form. Tomas G. Long shows how the genre of the text can influence the shape of the sermon. Long provides five key questions that can allow the form of the text to properly influence the sermon development: (1) What is the genre of the text? (2) What is rhetorical function of this genre? (3) What literary devices does this genre employ to achieve its rhetorical effect? (4) How in particular does the text under consideration, in its own literary setting, embody the characteristics and dynamics described in questions 1-3? (5) How may the sermon, in a new setting, say and do what the text says and does in its setting?<sup>48</sup> Henry Mitchell also shares the basic idea of Long when he writes: “Just as the choice of genre is often indicated by the text or purpose, so in turn the flow chart is determined by the genre, as just occurred with the figure of rock shelter in a storm.”<sup>49</sup>

But preachers do not have to merely adopt the form of the text as the sermon form. Text should be interpreted by the preacher and according to the preacher’s interpretation a different form can be applied. Henry Mitchell writes, “Sermon form, then becomes a hermeneutic in itself, releasing the scriptural Word among the hearers through the liberated expression of the preacher.”<sup>50</sup>

In *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, Bryan Chapell

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<sup>47</sup> Wardlaw, “The Need for New Shapes,” in *Preaching Biblically*, 21.

<sup>48</sup> Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible*, 24.

<sup>49</sup> Mitchell, *Celebration and Experience in Preaching*, 57.

<sup>50</sup> Wardlaw, *Preaching Biblically*, 11.

rightly speaks about why a sermon needs to be an exposition. He says,

Preachers have greater obligations than simply reporting a text's features. In order to expound a passage a preacher must explain context, establish meaning, and demonstrate implications in a way that a specific group of listeners will find interesting, understandable, and applicable. To accomplish these goals an expositor designs a homiletical outline to create a sermon faithful to the truths of the text and relevant to the needs of a congregation. And exegetical outline displays a passage's thought flow, the homiletically outline organizes the preacher's entire thought development.<sup>51</sup>

In the biblical sermon form, the concept of the sermon comes from the text. "The definition . . . the idea is derived from and transmitted through an historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context. This deals with how the preacher comes to his message and, second, with how he communicates it."<sup>52</sup> The biblical text shapes the form of the sermon as well as its content and rhetorical purpose in biblical preaching.

### **Having a Focus in the Sermon**

A sermon, textually faithful and contextually relevant, needs to have a focus. Biblical preaching always considers the focus of the sermon seriously, because without having a focus, preaching cannot be effective. Instead it wanders about aimlessly.

Different preachers may have different sermon forms, but each sermon has its own sermon focus. In a good sermon, there is only a single sermon focus. Fred Craddock explains the significance of the focus in a sermon by saying: "Unity does for the sermon what a frame does for a picture."<sup>53</sup> Unity is essential to the sermon movement. Because

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<sup>51</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 127.

<sup>52</sup> Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 22.

<sup>53</sup> Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 82.

“there can be no movement without unity, without singleness of theme.”<sup>54</sup>

Biblical sermon form has a focus for two reasons: the first one is that each biblical passage has a focus and the second one is that it is important in our human cognitive ability to understand. Our human cognitive ability prefers a focus that facilitates the flow of an idea, so we need a sermon that focuses on that human inclination toward unity.

A sermon has a focus because that was the intention of the Bible. We assume that every preaching-text has a theme, and a preaching-text we defined earlier as a complete literary unit, a thought unit, or thematic unit. Haddon Robinson adequately says, “Every sermon should have a theme, and that theme should be the theme of the portion of Scripture on which it is based.”<sup>55</sup>

In a biblical passage, we may see several ideas in a specific biblical text. But through a thorough analysis and exegesis we learn that all the ideas in the text are subordinate and supportive of a larger overarching issue.<sup>56</sup> In a passage, or pericope, there is only one governing idea and so a sermon should be focused on that idea.

Haddon Robinson helps us grasp the importance of a single idea in a sermon. Here is his famous proposition, “A sermon should be a bullet and not buckshot.” It clearly shows the significance of the single idea in a sermon. He explains: “Ideally each sermon is the explanation, interpretation, or application of a single dominant idea supported by other ideas, all drawn from one passage or several passages of Scripture.”<sup>57</sup> Haddon Robinson asserts the strength of the sermon which has an overarching big idea. “A central, unifying

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>55</sup> Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 34.

<sup>56</sup> Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 83.

<sup>57</sup> Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 33.

idea must be at the heart of an effective sermon.”<sup>58</sup> “Effective sermons major in biblical ideas brought together into an overarching unity.”<sup>59</sup> Duane Litfin also helps us to understand the significance of the focus in a sermon: “First, because God chose to communicate his inscripturated revelation in the form of ordinary human language, that communication of necessity will consist of organized units of discourse. Thus, to understand that revelation we must discern these units and discover the ideas they embody.”<sup>60</sup> We need a central idea in a sermon, because “a central idea within a speech promotes not only unity, but order and progress as well.”<sup>61</sup> Without having a main focus a sermon can be distracting and will lose its effectiveness.

But there are preachers who discount the big-idea sermon “with the insistence that the variety of needs in the average congregation can be addressed only by broad themes and multidirectioned messages.”<sup>62</sup> However that is against our human capability, because when there is a single idea, humans can grasp it. Also having several ideas in a sermon is against biblical intention, because each passage has only a single idea.

Traditionally and historically most preachers have been accustomed to the three points and one poem sermon. This sermon form has prevailed in the Korean church too. That’s because Korean preaching has learned from American preaching and is generally accepted no matter what theological standing they are taking.

A traditional topical, three point and one-poem sermon (a topical sermon) often has

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>60</sup> Keith Willhite and Scott M. Gibson, eds. *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching: Connecting the Bible to People* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 55.

<sup>61</sup> Duane Litfin, *Public Speaking: A Handbook for Christian* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 1992), 82.

<sup>62</sup> Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 92.

three themes rather than having three points. It does not rely on the text, but on the preacher's own idea and agenda. On the other hand, a verse-by-verse exposition also has several points or themes, or no points or no theme. Often a verse-by-verse sermon, or three-point sermon fails to get focused on the theme of the text, because each verse is equally stressed and can have its own focus, and so too many foci can distract the congregation's attention.

In preaching, a theme is a summary statement of the unifying thought of the text. A theme is usually thought of as the big idea, the central message, the proposition, unifying thought, major idea, the point of the text, the focus statement or thesis. The big idea is a unifying thought of the text. A complete literary unit has a big idea of its own. It consists of a thought unit, or a thematic unit. Donald Miller says, "Any sermon worthy of the name should have a theme. Ideally, any single sermon should have just one major idea. . . Two or three points which are not parts of one great idea do not make a sermon- they are two or three or four sermons all preached on one occasion."<sup>63</sup> Miller also asserts, "every sermon should have a theme, and that theme should be the theme of the portion of Scripture on which it is based."<sup>64</sup>

William Willimon points out the significance of a theme in preaching, but also points out its danger. "The danger of this device (theme) is that it may encourage me to treat my text as an abstract, generalized idea that has been distilled from the text--such as 'the real meaning behind the story of the prodigal son.' . . . My congregation listens to ideas about a story rather than experiencing the story. In spite of this pitfall, I don't know where I'm

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<sup>63</sup> Miller, *The Way to Biblical Preaching*, 53.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 55.

going in writing the sermon until I can clearly state a theme.”<sup>65</sup>

Sidney Greidanus tries to compromise thematic preaching and textual preaching. For him thematic preaching is not conflicting textual preaching. He suggests, “textual-thematic preaching.” “By the term textual-thematic preaching I mean preaching in which the theme of the sermon is rooted in the text.”<sup>66</sup> For this purpose, two questions are asked: “whether a sermon develops a specific theme and whether the sermon is based on a text.”<sup>67</sup> “In distinction from topical preaching, textual-thematic preaching obtains its theme not from the classics or the news media but from the preaching-text as understood in its context.”<sup>68</sup>

Having a clear sermon focus is always critical for biblical preaching. The biblical sermon always has a focus, because it is faithful to the intention of the biblical writer. Through the sermon focused on the intention of the Bible, the congregation sees, reads, and interprets the biblical text from his or her own congregation’s context.

## **Summary**

We cannot simply approve a specific sermon form. Sermon form cannot be captured under a single label. But one thing that no one can deny is that preaching should be biblically faithful.

As Greidanus suggests, the purpose and goal of biblical preaching is “respect for the text.” We cannot draw a unanimous agreement from the preachers and the homiletiicians. But we can come to the conclusion that preaching should be biblically faithful, and its form

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<sup>65</sup> William Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry*, 68.

<sup>66</sup> Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 122.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

should be expository preaching. Sermon form is critical in biblical preaching, because biblical preaching is affected by the sermon structure. But sermon form cannot dominate the sermon. Sermon form should be the “servant of the text, not its master.”<sup>69</sup> And whatever sermon form we use should be flexible and varied enough to reflect the varied forms of the Bible.<sup>70</sup>

Sermon form derives from the substance of the message itself, is inseparable from the content, and gives finality to the sermon. No matter what the form, the gospel must be seen as a principal ingredient in the sermon preached, as a major reason why the sermon was preached at all.

Sermon form becomes hermeneutic in itself, releasing the Word of God among the congregation through the expression of the preacher. Sermon form does its work immediately and at deeper levels than logic. Sermon form persuades the congregation directly and silently. When a sermon has a clear sermon focus, it can be delivered adequately to the congregation.

Here are the final definitions of biblical sermon form:

- (1) Preaching should be a faithful exposition of the Bible. The Bible should not take a mere supporting role for the sermon, but a major role instead.
- (2) The form or genre of the biblical passage governs the form of the sermon. Only when a sermon has the right structure and movement for the sermon, can it be effective. Therefore the sermon’s theme is identified with the biblical text’s theme.

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<sup>69</sup> Dennis M. Cahill, *Preaching by Design*, a Thesis, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, Mass., 1998, 27.

<sup>70</sup> Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 45.

(3) Preaching should be centered on Christ. When a sermon is Christ-centered, it is really biblical, because the main theme of the Bible is Christ.

(4) A sermon should have a focus, or a theme, or a big idea to be effective. Only when a sermon has a theme, or a big idea, can it help the congregation grasp the sermon clearly.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUGGESTIONS FOR KOREAN PREACHING

As we have seen, one of the strengths of Korean Christians is that they take the Bible seriously in their spiritual lives. The fact that the Bible is taken seriously should not be criticized for any reason, because Christian preaching is based on the Bible, interpreting and teaching the Bible. There is no preaching without the Bible.

The preacher should have a clear definition of biblical preaching. Without having appropriate skills of exegesis and exposition, accuracy in understanding the Bible and its authority can be seriously challenged. And some of the methodology of biblical hermeneutics should be tested with proper tools in order to analyze the context. Without any historical, literary study and exegesis Korean preachers are prevented from being more creative in their interpretation of the Bible.

Regarding sermon form, there is no one-size-fits-all sermon form, even though we regard expository preaching as one the most effective ways to interpret and preach the Bible in a contextually relevant way. New sermon forms need to be sought and practiced in the pulpit.

In the next chapter we will try providing suggestions for Korean preaching, based on the analysis of chapters one through five.

Preaching occurs in a particular cultural context. The Korean church is not culture-free. Korean Christians bring their own unique, cultural backgrounds, experiences, expectations and understandings to church. So, like other cultures, the Korean church has its own

uniqueness in the sense that it has been imbued with culturally Korean things. Therefore without an appropriate understanding of the uniqueness of the Korean church and adopting of proper preaching methods fitting the Korean context, a sermon cannot be labeled as Korean preaching. For that reason Korean preachers should have an adequate perception of the context of their congregations. Korean preaching should preserve the factors that are unique to the Korean culture and context, because biblical preaching will be ineffective “unless the preacher realizes that his listeners too exist at a particular address and have mindsets unique to them.”<sup>1</sup>

However, not many people will disagree that the Korean church and its preaching have been influenced and formed by western church and theology. Especially American theology and preaching have greatly influenced the Korean church. In the second half of the twentieth century Korean preaching was led by a group of popular preachers whose influence was so immense that many Korean preachers delivered their same messages, even though their contexts were different. As mentioned before, many Korean preachers are uncritically copying sermons of well-known American or Korean preachers and delivering their messages. The blame can be attributed to the lack of preparation time and lack of adequate skills. These issues are ongoing things for the Korean preachers and in that sense a fundamental solution should be sought eventually, but that task goes beyond the boundary of this project.

In order to accomplish the aim of this chapter I will lay out suggestions for Korean preachers and their preaching context. My suggestions will focus on sermon content and

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<sup>1</sup> Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 27.

form and other related issues concerning biblical preaching, rather than dealing with the broad range of issues of Korean preaching.

### **Accurate Perception of Biblical Preaching**

Preaching should be biblical, if it is to be a Christian sermon, because Christianity and its message are based on the Bible. Without the Bible there is no Christianity, no Christian preaching. If a sermon is not biblical, it is not a sermon, but a speech, no matter how rhetorically it is delivered to the congregation and no matter how many biblical quotations it has. However, speaking about the Bible does not necessarily make a sermon biblical. To make a sermon biblical that sermon has to be biblically based and focused.

As we examined in the previous chapters, an adequate understanding of preaching is apparently lacking among many Korean preachers. Many Korean preachers have struggled even in their fundamental understanding of biblical preaching. It was an unavoidable result, because many of them were sent into the field of ministry without having adequate training in tackling the text. It is obvious that without having a relevant understanding of biblical preaching, preaching will be pointless, lose its focus and worse, it will be unbiblical. Therefore Korean preachers above all need to have adequate skills to perceive and explain the Bible.

As we have seen in the previous chapter the topical sermon form still prevails in Korean preaching. It is easily noticed that even when their sermons are based on the text, those sermons take the form of a three-point sermon. It can be explained that that specific sermon form has become familiar to Korean preachers, and that form is easy to prepare,

and in fact many Korean preachers don't know of other methods to prepare sermons.

Biblical preaching always says what the Bible speaks. Biblical preaching always considers the Bible central to preaching. Therefore a sermon, which is biblically sound starts with the text, goes through the text, and applies its message to the congregation. Biblical passages should not be the footnotes for the preacher's own message. Biblical preaching in the Korean context should express the basic subject and theme of the Bible. For many Korean sermons biblical texts take only a supporting role in preaching. Therefore, in order to avoid this risk, expository preaching should be seriously considered and be applied to and practiced in the Korean church.

As we saw earlier, Haddon Robinson's definition of biblical preaching provides a clear direction for Korean preaching. He writes, "I would venture to offer a definition of what I believe biblical preaching is: Biblical preaching is the proclamation of the gospel to people in relation to their contemporary life, through faithful exposition of the scripture as one is empowered by the Holy Spirit. Such proclamation often concludes with an invitation for a decision or action." In his definition, he puts a strong emphasis on the "thorough faithful exposition of the scripture." His use of the word "through faithful" is open to discussion, but his definition helps us to gain a clear vision of biblical preaching.

For more accurate understanding of the text, Korean preachers need to rely on more diverse versions of the Bible. The most popular version of the Bible<sup>2</sup> was translated in 1930s and was revised in 1960s. Its words are too old for most people to understand and many grammatical errors have been pointed out, and so it is hard to have an accurate

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<sup>2</sup> *Gae-Youk Seong-Kyung* (Seoul: Korean Bible Society, 2004).

understanding of some texts. There is an even deeper problem in that it was translated from the English Bible, instead of from the original language. This version is still widely used by most Korean preachers. Recently some newly translated versions of the Bible have been published, but they have yet to gain acceptance in the Korean church.

### **Exegetically Accurate Exposition**

In preaching, there are bipolar works that no one should neglect. They are exegesis and application of the biblical message to the congregation's context. Biblical sermons always consider both elements seriously.

Preaching is about the Bible. Preaching must speak about the Bible. Without the Bible there is no preaching. So the first and foremost task for the preacher is to have a correct and clear knowledge of the Bible arrived at through proper analysis and exegesis of the Bible. Adequate knowledge and skills are required for biblical study and biblical preaching, because only through a thorough and correct analysis of the biblical text can its lessons be understood and delivered to the congregation in an adequate and relevant way. So, for biblical preaching the significance of accurate analysis and exposition should be always stressed. In order to adequately analyze and exegete the Bible, a preacher needs to have the proper tools to interpret the Bible correctly and appropriately. "Faithful exposition" of a biblical text is possible only when an accurate exegesis of the text is done. When accuracy of the exegesis of the text is doubted, it will lose its genuine power of the Word. Therefore, in the process of exegesis the key is how accurately the interpreter understands the biblical text.

Biblical preaching has nothing to do with the number of biblical quotations in a sermon. Even when a sermon has contains many biblical verses, it still may not necessarily be a biblical sermon, because whether a sermon is biblical or not depends on its faithfulness to the intention of the Biblical passage, not on how many biblical passages are quoted. If a sermon fails to be faithful to the intention of the biblical passage, it can be a sermon that is not based on the Bible, and can be unbiblical. So the criterion for biblical preaching is how faithfully a sermon holds onto the intention of the writer.

Preaching starts with a thorough analysis on the text. Historical, literary study of the Bible helps the preacher gain a correct and adequate understanding of the Bible and enhances the quality of the sermon content. Therefore Korean preachers need to conduct historical and literary study of biblical passages in order to avoid a superficial, theologically biased interpretation of the Bible. Among Korean Christians it has become common knowledge that evangelical preachers have a tendency to avoid historical, literary study of the Bible, while liberal-minded preachers tend to interpret the Bible as a mere literary book of a faith community. The necessity of using the literary, historical method should be a priority; additionally Korean preachers need to train themselves to use adequate tools to analyze and exposit a biblical text.

In the analysis of a biblical text, correctly perceiving the intention of the author or redactor of the biblical text is the key. The purpose of biblical exegesis is to know what God is saying in the biblical text. And it is our premise that God's purpose is expressed to the authors or redactors of the Bible. To understand God's purpose in a specific situation and why he spoke to a specific person or people in the biblical text, the preacher needs to

utilize adequate tools and skills to explore and examine a biblical text. However, the opportunity for preaching using these steps is not possible in the Korean church, because most preachers lack the skills to do the adequate analysis of a biblical text. They need help that fits their particular situation. Lack of time for sermon preparation is no excuse for the generally poor quality of sermons delivered by Korean preachers. Theological seminaries should provide more opportunity to learn skills to analyze the Bible and to write biblically sound sermons, and preachers have to put forth more effort in order to make progress in their sermon content.

### **Biblically Correct Sermons**

A biblical sermon should be based on the biblical text. It should talk about the text, dig out the message hidden in the text and explain it. No matter how rhetorically a sermon is proclaimed, if it is not based on the biblical text, it cannot be a biblical sermon. The biblical passages should not be employed to support the theology or the ideology of the preachers. The biblical text should not be used to shore up the doctrinal or personal (or institutional) purpose of the preacher. However in the context of the Korean church, the Bible has been frequently abused for the preacher's purpose, because preaching has often been too doctrinal and loyal to denominational purposes and benefit rather than being faithful to the intention of the biblical writers.

In interpreting the Bible, we should acknowledge that there will be differences, because it is unrealistic to expect uniformity among all the different interpretations of the Bible. But in spite of this reality, one point we should all agree on is that all interpretations of the

Bible should be biblically sound and correct. This proposition should be equally applied to Korean preaching. But in Korean preaching the intention of the preacher often directs and rules the sermon. This is especially true in contemporary liberal theology. Liberal theology has greatly influenced Korean preaching, and accordingly the authority and authenticity of the Bible has been seriously challenged and damaged. But under all circumstances, the message of the biblical text should set the tone of the sermon, not the preacher's intention or ideology. A biblical passage should not be utilized for the intention of the preacher. Preaching always should be faithful to the intention of the writer of the Bible, not to the intention of the preacher. For this matter, in order to be biblical a sermon's basic concept should be taken from the passage on which it is based.

In the previous chapter we examined two biblical interpretations in the Korean preaching: "spiritual interpretation" and "allegorical interpretation." The so-called "spiritual interpretation" has been popular among Korean preachers. However that interpretation is selective and subjective and so it always risks privatizing or distorting the message of the Bible. And actually there is no logical criterion for "spiritual" interpretation. It arbitrarily depends on the interpreter's whimsical thought and judgment. In any case, there is no justification for such subjective and selective interpretation of the Bible. With the test of sound biblical theology "spiritual interpretation" can be corrected or avoided. Sermons should be tested to see if they are biblically correct and sound if they are to remain biblical. Only when a sermon is biblical, can it be faithful to the intention of the authors of the biblical text and be considered a truly proper sermon.

In this manner, regarding the issue of accuracy of the biblical exegesis and

interpretation, allegorical interpretation should be carefully considered and applied, even though it is still very popular among Korean preachers. It above all has a risk of manipulating the original intention of the writers, to privatize the original meaning of the biblical text, and, in the worst case to distort and destroy its meaning according to the interpreter's arbitrary and whimsical thought. Of course nobody can deny that allegorical interpretation is an effective tool to explain some particular biblical verses or stories. But it does not mean that allegorical interpretation can be applied to all the biblical passages. Allegorical interpretation has a risk of privatizing the Bible and when the biblical verses are privatized and abused by preachers, they lose their authority and authenticity.

Therefore, Korean preachers should understand the significance of accurate exegesis and interpretation and put more attention on biblical analysis and interpretation. And when they use allegorical interpretations or “spiritual interpretation,” they should do so in an objective way. Again, for accurate and sound interpretation of the Bible, Korean preachers need to familiarize themselves with adequate skills and boldly practice those skills in their fields.

### **Diversified Sermon Form**

If a sermon is exegetically and homiletically faithful to the Bible, it can be understood as biblical. To be biblical, a faithful exposition of the biblical text turns into a biblically adequate sermon delivery form. If we define preaching as connecting the message of the Bible to the life of the congregation, we don't have to stick to a few types of sermon delivery. The situation of the congregation changes and the way of communication

changes, so does the way of communicating the good news of Christ with the people. In terms of sermon form Jesus' parable of the "new wineskin for new wine" is absolutely true.<sup>3</sup> In that sense Korean preaching needs to overcome its uniformity and simplicity in sermon form and pattern. There is no one-size-fits-all sermon form for preaching, even though the preacher has his or her own preferences on specific sermon form or sermon pattern. Biblical preaching does not mean that preachers have only one way of preaching. Using faithful exposition of the Bible and adopting expository preaching does not mean that Korean preachers have to choose only one type of sermon delivery. They need to diversify shapes in preaching.

In order to be biblical, a sermon above all should be biblically based and focused. If a sermon fails in analyzing biblical text thoroughly and does not take a clear sermon idea out of the text, its effectiveness will be noticeably diminished. Therefore, like Haddon Robinson's catch word, "A sermon should be a bullet and not buckshot,"<sup>4</sup> A sermon should focus on a single idea. Biblical sermon form always understands the significance of the focus and considers the focus seriously in the preaching.

As we have observed the topical, three-point sermon form has become the dominate sermon delivery form in Korean preaching. The weakness of that form has been identified as using the Bible for supporting material, rather than it being the primary message of the sermon. So, as long as the preacher sticks to the topical sermon, the sermon can be mere footnotes for the preacher's intention. Among Korean preachers this inclination is strong,

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<sup>3</sup> "Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved" (Matt 9:17).

<sup>4</sup> Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 33.

so a faithful exposition of the Bible and adopting relevant sermon form are needed.

One of the underlying purposes of this thesis is to illuminate the significance of biblical preaching. And it has been identified that expository preaching is the best way to deliver the message of the Bible, because expository preaching is faithful to the Bible and is focused on finding the primary theme of the biblical passage. Therefore if Korean preaching is to be faithful to the Bible, it must be expository.

Korean preachers need to be more creative in trying new sermon forms, because Korean congregations with their own unique historical and cultural experiences need sermons created specifically for them. Again there is no one-size-fit-all sermon form for Korean preaching. Korean preachers should be both creative and courageous in trying new sermon forms.

### **Contextually Relevant Sermon**

Preaching is more than a mere technique of communicating a biblical passage to the congregation. Preaching depends to a large degree on its delivering method and its hearers. Regarding the hearers, my assumption is that a sermon can be biblical only when it is contextually relevant. Edmund Steimle says that a sermon can fulfill its own purpose only when it is appropriately applied to the congregation's context. The biblical passage was properly applied to its original hearers and so it was relevant to its original context. A biblical sermon considers context seriously. Sermons should be relevant to the context of the congregation, because the biblical text was relevant to the original hearers. So a biblical sermon seeks relevancy to the context by being faithful to the message of the biblical

passage. Opposition to the biblical sermons comes from the failure to apply the message of the text to the context of the congregation. If the preacher fails to explain the meaning and message of the biblical text in a particular context, it cannot be biblical preaching, even though the text is accurately analyzed and explained. Therefore relevancy to context should be considered as a primary issue when a sermon is prepared. In that sense, Haddon Robinson's definition of "biblical" as "relevant to the hearer's situation" is right and should be always considered.

Out of interpretation of the biblical passage, the preacher distills a contextually relevant idea from it. It does not mean that a sermon always meets the needs of the congregation. But when it is biblical, a sermon can be both relevant to the situation of the congregation and an effective instrument for the delivering of the divine intention.

A biblically faithful sermon is also contextually relevant, because it was applied to the original hearers' situation and was tested in the writer's situation and proven as truth. Biblical preaching takes its ideas from the Bible and connects those ideas to the congregation's life.

Biblical preaching should not sacrifice the intention of the writer in order to provide relevancy to the context of the congregation. A biblical sermon should be faithful to the intention of the writer. But in Korean preaching this has been frequently ignored and neglected as we observed in the previous chapter. Therefore Korean preaching has to take relevancy by being biblically faithful and by being relevant to the congregation's situation.

In order to be relevant to Korean congregations Korean preaching has to use its own stories and experiences as illustrations. Popular Korean preachers use many illustrations

and stories in their sermons, but they have been criticized to depend on the illustrations from the West.<sup>5</sup> To effectively reach the Korean congregation Korean preachers need to consider the cultural context of their congregation, and use illustrations and stories from their own life experience and Korean culture in general.

One more thing that we need to consider for Korean preaching is how to retain the prophetic message.<sup>6</sup> Historically Korean sermons have been criticized as ahistorical and lacking interest in the prophetic message.<sup>7</sup> Sung-Min Lee correctly points out one of the problems of Korean preaching: “In the Korean church, the most required thing is that priestly mission and prophetic mission have been understood as separate, and have been proclaimed according to that understanding.”<sup>8</sup> If we properly realized that evangelical preachers of the Korean church have been criticized as solely focused on the priestly aspect as Sung-Min Lee indicated, Korean preachers will know how effectively they produce and proclaim their sermons in the Korean context. When we correctly read the Bible and apply it to the congregation’s context, it will make a balance between prophetic and priestly mission and its relevancy will be rightly claimed and can be rightly biblical.

## Summary

We have provided some suggestions for Korean preaching from the perspective of biblical preaching. We cannot wait in limbo until the fundamental problems of Korean

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<sup>5</sup> Jung-Young Lee, *Korean Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 87.

<sup>6</sup> This issue is not dealt in this thesis, because it is beyond this project. But historically in the Korean Christian’s context it has been a critical theological matter.

<sup>7</sup> The Korean church’s inclination for the “spiritual interpretations” and for the “allegorical interpretation” has been criticized for this reason.

<sup>8</sup> Dae-II Wang and Sung-Min Lee, *Old Testament Preaching Paradigm* (Seoul: Korean Christian Publishing Company, 2002), 255.

preaching are fixed. In order to create sermons that are biblically accurate and relevant to the Korean context, Korean preachers need to open their ears to the criticism, and learn to utilize the methods of interpreting and explaining the Bible in the Korean context.

In the Korean church biblical preaching is more urgently needed, because the authority and authenticity of the Bible has been seriously challenged and damaged. Only biblically faithful preaching can effectively protect the message of the Bible from the attacks of liberal theology that regard the Bible as a mere human work.

One thing I need to mention here is about the number of times a Korean preacher has to preach. As I indicated in the previous chapter, lessening the numbers of time to preach is an urgent task for most Korean pastors. Even though the Korean preacher has a correct understanding of biblical preaching and has appropriate skills to develop biblical sermon, unless enough time to create sermon is not given, he or she cannot get out the same problem. However, seeking solutions to this problem is beyond this study. So I here will briefly provide a few ways to solve that problem.

Korean pastors can lessen the numbers of time to preach by giving some preaching occasions, for example Sunday night worship or Wednesday worship service, or Friday night gathering, to assistant ministers or lay speakers. And the Korean preacher can also use daily devotionals or many spiritual help books for the daily early morning prayer meeting rather than creating and delivering a full sermon for each day. And the Korean preacher can get help from the lay people in saving a certain amount of time for developing sermons, if the heavy workload of congregational visiting is shared with them. If we understand that preaching is an important way to serve God and His people, the Korean preacher should be

determined to improve the quality of their sermons and should not be hesitant to ask their congregations for help.

Suggestions for preaching can be summed up as:

1. A sermon should interpret the text accurately and deliver it to the congregation relevantly.
2. A sermon form needs to employ diverse ways of interpretation in order to have an accurate exegesis.
3. A sermon form needs to be expository, not topical and three-point, because expository is the best way to be faithful to the Bible. Korean preachers need to focus on the Bible, and to deliver sermons more effectively by becoming educated on using sound and effective skills for biblical interpretation.
4. A sermon should be theologically sound and correct, and should avoid monopolizing the interpretation of the Bible. One specific method of interpretation should not be applied to all biblical passages.
5. A sermon should be relevant to the Korean congregation's context. Expository preaching should take the context of the congregation seriously, so that the text truly reveals the Word and connects it to the real life of the congregation.
6. A sermon should ground its content in a biblical passage, and let the biblical passage speak without being distorted or tarnished by the preacher's theological bias or ideological conception. When a sermon is thoroughly based on the Bible and interprets the Bible, that sermon will be effectively proclaimed, and be biblically sound.

My final point is that biblical preaching should be done with sincere prayer and

meditation. In the process of creating a sermon a preacher should connect with the message of the text. If the preacher fails to hear the message of the biblical text, that sermon will lose its power and point, and so cannot be biblical. Therefore the preacher should be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit in the entire process of preaching.

## CHAPTER 6

### TEACHING BIBLICAL PREACHING TO KOREAN PASTORS

As I pointed out in the previous chapter Korean preachers should develop skills in preparing and delivering biblical sermons. The Korean preachers' situation is not radically different than that of American preachers, even though from their perspective their unique situation demands practical assistance. Lack of time to devote to sermon preparation cannot be used as an excuse for delivering poor sermons to the congregation. Helping Korean preachers develop a more practical and effective sermon preparation process is urgently needed. So in this chapter, based on the previous chapters, I will provide some guidelines for creating biblical sermons.

#### **Guidelines for Creating Biblical Sermons**

I will examine how I might teach Korean preachers biblical preaching: why a sermon should be biblical and how to create a biblical sermon and effectively deliver it to the congregation. I will lay out a teaching plan for how I could communicate the theory and the method of exegetical preaching to my fellow Korean preachers.

Helping Korean preachers cut back the amount of sermons they deliver in order to dedicate more time to the process of creating quality sermons is critical. Without lessening the frequency of preaching, the Korean preacher cannot prepare and deliver sermons effectively. It is important to help Korean preachers to maximize their skills and time to prepare sermons. For this purpose they need to learn to use their time more effectively.

However dealing with this issue here is beyond the focus of this thesis.

In the theological Seminary preaching class and exegesis class should be mandatory, not selective. As long as theological seminaries continue to fail in providing a thorough program to teach new preachers, Korean sermons will not improve homiletically and biblically. Both preaching class and exegesis class should be mandatory for at least two semesters.

Regular professional development that includes teaching exegetical and homiletical skills to the pastors who are practicing in the pulpit on a regular basis should be considered and tried more often.

More manuals and books on biblical preaching should be published in the Korean language. More study should be devoted to writing and effectively delivering biblical sermons that reflect a serious and in-depth understanding of the importance of Scripture and the Korean congregation's situation.

Teaching Korean preachers to make sermon plans is an effective way to help them. Unlike many American preachers of the main-line denominational churches most Korean preachers do not have a lectionary reading guide (only Catholic churches and a few small denominations are using their own lectionary readings for their weekly preaching), but rely on their week to week plans. Therefore teaching the steps to making sermons which are appropriate to their particular context can be very effective and practical.

I am a Methodist pastor and most Korean Methodist pastors hold some type of monthly gathering. So using a pastor's monthly gathering as an opportunity to teach them about biblical preaching would be practical.

Helping Korean preachers adequately evaluate their sermons is also critical. But the evaluation process should be brief and efficient, due to the time constraints most Korean preachers are under.

### **Preaching Class Curriculum**

I will provide an example of curriculum to help Korean preachers to understand biblical sermons and to effectively deliver biblical sermons on the pulpit.

#### **Course Description**

This class aims at helping preachers to understand the basic definition of biblical preaching and to know how to create biblical sermons in their local church.

#### **Purpose and Goals**

This is a course with a particular focus. It seeks to understand how preachers deliver biblical sermons relevantly to the congregation: It especially seeks to develop, construct and deliver biblical sermons. This process will demand a respect and appreciation for the biblical text as integral to preaching the gospel.

It examines models in order to explain and appreciate biblical sermons. There are three goals in this class: (1) We will exegete the Bible; (2) we will discuss various ways of connecting the exegesis to the sermon; and (3) we will preach sermons in class for one another and evaluate them.

### Class Attendance

Because this is a seminar/workshop/lecture performance course requiring regular and vigorous involvement from each person, on-time attendance at all meetings of the class is expected.

### Required Texts

The Bible (any translation)

Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1980).

Jong-Soo Park, *Theory and Practice of Biblical Preaching* (Seoul: The Christian Literature Society of Korea, 2002).

### Assignments

Two exegesis papers, 2 pages, the first based on any pericope. I want you to make it clear just how you plan to move from your reading of the text to a sermon on that text.

One sermon will be preached in class, and one sermon will be written and turned in.

Weekly reading assignments are the backbone of class discussion. Please work hard to keep up with the reading for the class.

### Session 1

Introduction to biblical preaching will be provided.

In the light of the readings, submit a two-page typed critical reflection upon a sermon you have recently preached.

## Session 2

What do I need to learn from this course?

Problems and challenges in Korean preaching

Definition of biblical preaching (expository preaching)

What makes a sermon biblically correct and sound?

Biblical analysis and criticism

Assignment: “The most valuable lesson I ever learned from the Bible.”

## Session 3

Matters of writing and preaching biblical sermons

Compare topical sermons and biblical sermons

## Session 4

How to create an expository sermon

How to write a biblical sermon: Form, Style

Sermon delivery

Preaching practice and evaluation

Critique teams deal with elements of style and delivery; critique in terms of the text and your sermon

Prepare a brief homily (no more than two pages) in which you spoke in a biblical preaching

## Session 5

Present to class your homily based upon one of the assigned works of art.

## Session 6

Presentation of biblical sermons

Prepare and be ready to present in class a 15-20 minute sermon based on biblical text.

Submit two copies of your sermon manuscript on the day your sermon is delivered.

Sermons will be videotaped, and you will view your tape and submit a thorough, written self-critique no later than the first class meeting after your sermon has been preached.

Steps are provided below to create a sermon for Sunday worship service.

### **Steps for Creating a Biblical Sermon**

Step 1, Plan the Sermon and Pick the Text (Monday)

Consult the church calendar.

Decide if you will follow the guide of the Lectionary or choose a text yourself.

When you choose a text, consider the needs and context of the congregation.

Consider the goal of the sermon.

Begin praying and meditating on your chosen text.

Step 2, Study the Text and Search for the Exegetical Idea (Monday & Tuesday)

Read the text out loud at least three times.

Brainstorm and jot down all of your random thoughts, ideas, feelings, things, etc.

What is the major question or problem addressed by the text?

What is the text's answer?

How does God act in the text? What does God say?

How do the people act and react in the text?

What is the good news, or bad news?

What is the textual setting?

What is the context of the congregation?

What difference does the text make to those to whom you preach?

How will the people be affected if they really hear what you preach?

What will they do? What do you expect?

Consult secondary sources.

Study structure, vocabulary, idioms, and grammar of the text.

Check to see that you completely and correctly understand the text.

### Step 3, Dig Out the Big Idea (Tuesday)

Discover the big idea (or subject, or theme) of the text.

Write it in one declarative sentence that the congregation can understand.

Read the big idea aloud to memorize it.

### Step 4, Make Outlines of the Sermon (Wednesday)

Create the shape (structure) of the sermon.

Create a simple and clear outline.

Do not make too many points.

#### Step 5, Collect Support Materials (Wednesday)

Collect illustrations and stories. First gather Korean illustrations.

Evaluate the relevancy of the illustrations in the sermon.

Evaluate the relevancy of the illustrations to the hearer's context.

#### Step 6, Write the Manuscript (Thursday, Sermon Preparation Day)

Keep the big idea in mind.

Follow the outline.

Never let more than three sentences go by without saying something concrete.

Write for hearing, not for reading.

Write an introduction that will grab and hold the attention of the hearers.

The conclusion should be short, sharp, and make practical application of the text to the hearer.

#### Step 7, Practice and Polish the Sermon (Friday, Saturday and Sunday)

Practice, practice, practice.

Practice in the actual setting, sanctuary.

Read the sermon manuscript out loud at least 7 times.

Memorize important lines and the movements of the sermon.

Record and then listen to yourself delivering the sermon (Use a voice recorder)

#### Step 8, Deliver the Sermon (Sunday)

Bring an outline (or notes) and use it.

Do not bring the whole manuscript.

#### Step 9, Evaluate the Sermon Delivery (Sunday or Monday)

Did your sermon meet the goal?

Did you feel the presence of God while you're preaching?

Did your congregation feel the presence of God?

Did you get any comments? What kinds of comments?

What should be improved?

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

It is a joy to learn biblical preaching through a more thorough study. Through this study I came to understand the urgency of biblical preaching in the Korean church. This study has in particular helped me know expository sermon as a best sermon delivery form, because it helps the preacher to be faithful to the biblical verses, and to the intentions of the biblical writers. This study also has led me to the awareness that when a sermon is relevant to the congregation, it will be a biblically faithful sermon. My ongoing study will be on how to help Korean preachers create biblically correct and contextually relevant sermons in their extremely busy ministry.

I above all have to acknowledge that this study could have been better, if more practical and relevant helps for the Korean preacher were developed and provided. Unless a study cannot provide concrete and practical solutions it can be echoless effort. Therefore, by providing more practical solutions to the problems in the Korean preaching, this study could have helped the Korean preacher do their ministry more effectively. In that sense, this study can be the first step for further study on biblical preaching in the Korean church.

Since the first Christian church proclaimed the good news of Christ, preaching has been one of the most important traditions of the church and the most significant tool to deliver it to the people. And this is particularly true in the Korean church as well. In the last two decades of the twentieth century, preaching played a critical role in the growth of the church in Korea. Even though Korean preaching has been criticized theologically

and socially, nobody can deny that it has been the backbone for the growth of the Korean church.

In preaching, the Bible is the center, not only because we preach the Bible, but also because it delivers the gospel of the Bible. Without the Bible there is no Christian preaching. Therefore, Christian preaching should be based on the Bible and revolve on the Bible and proclaim the message of the Bible.

The Bible is the Word of God and so is the truth. The Bible has sole authority. No one can claim his or her authority higher than the Bible. This is important for contemporary Korean Christians and their preachers, because the basis of biblical truth has been challenged and shaken to its roots. Lacking a solid understanding of the Bible a preacher can weaken the Bible – causing it to lose its authenticity and conviction. Only when a preacher believes in the Bible's finality, authority and authenticity, can his or her preaching be faithful to its essential role.

The Bible should claim its sole authority, even though the Bible is a human work. Neither the interpreter, nor the preacher should ever claim the authority. The fact that the Bible was written by human hands does not mean that it has any fault or is in any way limited in its ability to convey the Word of God. We should not put authority in the hands of the interpreter but on the Bible itself. The Bible is the Word of God, so it is expounded and explained as the Word of God. And biblical criticism should not change the authority of the Bible. Even though the Bible was affected or tainted by human

context, its authority should not be doubted, because it carries the message of the Word.

Preaching should be biblical. Only when the preacher tackles the biblical text seriously and seeks what God wants to speak in the text and delivers the message we hear in a relevant way, can a sermon be biblical.

It may be easy to claim that a sermon is biblical. But we should be cautious about that. Using biblical texts and focusing on biblical characters and quoting some biblical verses cannot guarantee that our preaching is biblical. Preachers should always bear witness to what the Bible says and what the Bible intends to say.

Preaching should be biblical. When a sermon is biblical, it can deliver the gospel of Christ, because the message of the gospel is based on the Bible. Preaching is more than the explication of a text, more than the presentation of objective biblical truth. Even though we cannot say that biblical preaching is expository preaching, perhaps expository preaching is the best form of biblical preaching, because an expository sermon explains what the text means.

As we have shown in the previous chapters, in order to be biblically faithful a sermon is required to have some fundamental elements. Our final definition of biblical preaching points out those elements: (1) The sermon theme or subject expresses the subject or theme of the biblical text. (2) The sermon says what the biblical text intends to mean. (3) The sermon has to make a connection between the biblical text and the present context. And (4) the sermon has to draw out the biblical theme and the gospel of

Jesus Christ to be truly biblical.

Korean preaching can be effective only when the preacher understands the context and unique experience of their congregations. Obviously Korean Christians have historically and culturally unique experiences and this fact requires unique methods for Korean preaching. Without considering the salient characteristics of the Korean congregation Korean preaching will not penetrate into the hearts of Korean congregations and will never bear fruit.

Preachers need to open themselves to God's Word in Scripture, not only to experience the reality of God's grace but also to receive some sense of how to represent that reality in their sermon. Korean preachers should bear witness to what a biblical text says and evoke it in the Korean congregation's unique situation. So, the primary task for Korean preachers is to become biblically sound and contextually relevant.

In preaching, the gospel of Christ is proclaimed, because Jesus Christ is the center of the Bible. We are committed to the uniqueness of Christ. We reject the notion that all roads lead to God, for the simple reason that the Bible expressly rejects it. There are overarching convictions that all biblical writers share the centrality of Jesus Christ, the presence of the Spirit.

Preachers should open themselves to God's Word in Scripture, therefore, not only to experience the Word of God but also to receive some sense of how to represent that

reality in the sermon. Biblical preaching recognizes that the message to be proclaimed is from God, and is directed to people, not just for the sake of proclaiming.

If we understand that the purpose of preaching is to deliver the revelation of God to his people, the preacher should be faithful to the intention of God. An invitation to the listening congregation to enter into the world of the text should be an ongoing work of preachers. And Korean preaching should hold on to that purpose. The transcendental factors of the Bible demand that the Korean church follow the previously mentioned principles in order to faithfully deliver biblical preaching.

No matter how rapidly our society is changing, the primary purpose of preaching remains the same. A sermon should be faithful to the intention of biblical writers and should be appropriate for the context of the congregation. For this reason, Korean preachers need to be more creative in adopting sermon form and content.

Obviously Korean preachers have their limitations but they also have great possibility for the future. They need to overcome their limitations and to create their sermons through thorough analysis, systemic experimentation and practicing biblical preaching in their preaching. It is an ongoing task to make Korean preaching adequate and relevant to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. To realize this goal Korean preachers must pray and prepare and proclaim, relying on the leading of the Holy Spirit.

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## VITA

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